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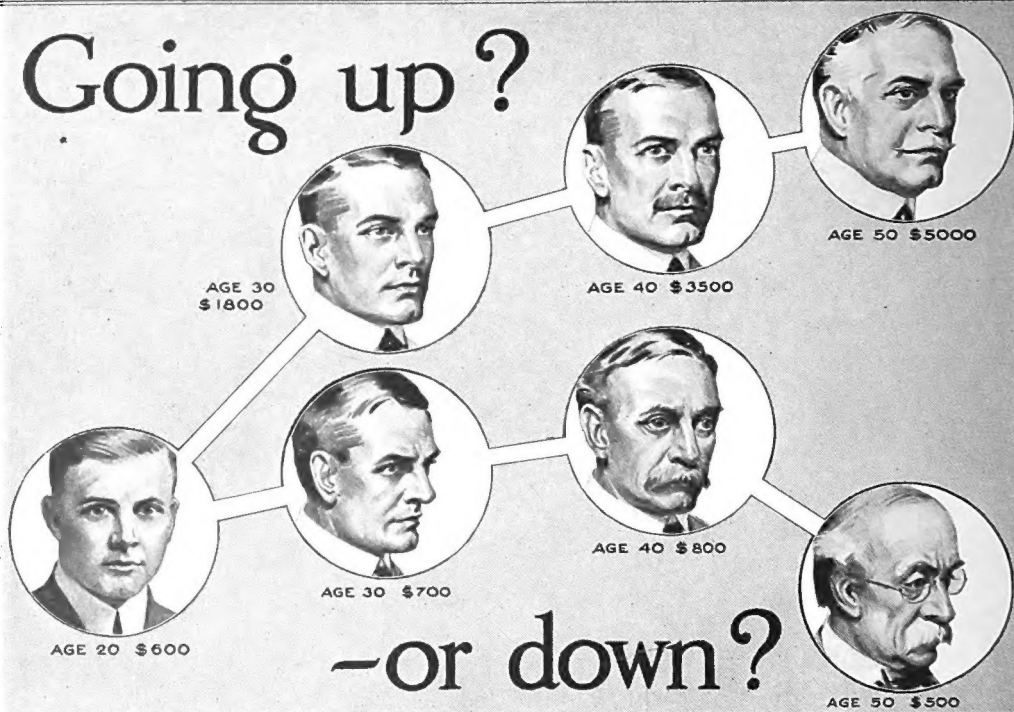
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Contents for January, 1917

- The Man Factory** *A Complete Novel* Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton 3
When it's a tale of the Northland, told by the Pinkertons, whose own little cabin is snow-bound, half the year, you know you will meet men and women worth knowing. You do. And their struggle against the relentless, overwhelming forces of a Northern Winter will hold you to the last page.
- Points of View** *Poem* Ed. L. Carson 51
- A Hero Under Pressure** William Dudley Pelley 52
Will Vermont's native sons come back to their old Green Mountain State? This story, told by a 100% Vermonter, takes a throat-hold on the question—tells you what a lot the State has to offer her sons. And takes a long step toward solving the problem for Vermont.
- The Brothers** James Francis Dwyer 66
A hunt for gold far out on the Great American Desert where the heat-waves dance and beckon; and the supreme test of two strong men.
- On the Way Back** Roy P. Churchill 72
Two-Fist Holl proves there's a heap of good in the heart of the toughest jackie who ever landed in the Naval Hospital after a night ashore.
- Finished** *A Five-Part Story. Part I* H. Rider Haggard 78
Once more you meet *Allan Quatermain*, prince of adventurers, and see unfolded one of history's greatest dramas, staged in the mountains of Zululand. We have never given you a more powerful story. The writer needs no introduction. It was he who wrote "She" and "King Solomon's Mines."
- The Curse of Gold** W. C. Tuttle 108
One good laugh after another. For you have this well-known humorist at his best. The West, a hold-up, and a double-barreled surprise.
- The Will to Die** Edwin C. Dickenson 115
A tale of the sea, filled with the boom of storm-blown canvas, made beautiful by the strength of a woman's heart—a woman who was an outcast.
- In the Sawdust Country** Harrison R. Howard 121
You're going into a California lumber-camp and have the gamest man in the woods slap you on the back and show you around the settlement. Remember, your two fists may come in handy. They love a scrap in there.

(Continued on next page)

1

(Continued from preceding page)

The Night Rider W. C. Macdonald 128
The "show" train on a big railroad had been held up a half-dozen times. Then the cleverest man-hunter in America got on the job. We dare you to guess the ending.

The Chase of the Four Fools *A Three-Part Story. Conclusion* . . . Patrick and Terence Casey 132
In which the Green, Green God reaches its final resting-place, and *Butterfly of the Dark*, still carrying her one-stringed fiddle, finds the world's greatest treasure. If you missed the first parts of this thrilling tale of Borneo, a complete introduction will give you what has gone before.

The Big Flash James B. Hendryx 163
A Southern mountaineer carries his feud to New York, and the big town gets a glimpse of real action as they know it in Tennessee.

The Killer, the Kid, and the Bad Man Nevil G. Henshaw 171
The Killer held forth in Louisiana swamps; the Kid's stronghold was a Louisiana town; the Bad Man blew in from a Wild West show. Their interests suddenly clash and they stage an act that's a whirlwind.

Stubborn Steve Brevard Mays Connor 179
Steve kicked because his wife used rouge—kicked so hard he landed over in old Mexico, slam up against a gang of Greasers who lived "off the country." Then things broke fast.

Primitive Christianity *A Complete Novelette* Arthur D. Howden Smith 185
Our old friend Captain McConaughy couldn't resist a chance to lead his crew of psalm-singing, fighting sailors against the Senussi who, as he understood it, were the top-notch heathen of the world, and were grinding out the lives of thousands of Christians under their pagan heels. On a bleak shore of Asia Minor you get a look at the inside workings of this powerful secret order of the Mohammedans—a power which is said to be directing the holy war against Armenians in Asiatic Turkey.

The Camp-Fire *A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers* 214

Headings James Daugherty

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1916. State of New York. County of New York. Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared James F. Birmingham, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the *Adventure*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougall Streets, New York, N. Y. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of the total amount of stock.) Owner: THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougall Streets, New York City. Stockholders: THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougall Streets, New York, N. Y. WM. H. BLACK, 812 Lincoln Avenue, Mendota, Illinois. MRS. THERESA R. CARROLL, 777 Madison Avenue, New York City, N. Y. W. H. GELSHENEN, 100 William Street, New York City, N. Y. CLARA E. KEHOE, 2524 Creston Avenue, New York City, N. Y. H. F. MORSE, 3 West 46th Street, New York City, N. Y. LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 156 Ridge Street, Glens Falls, N. Y. MRS. ARETHUSA POND, 955 West End Avenue, New York City, N. Y. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. R. A. VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. H. N. WHITNEY & SONS, 17 Broad Street, New York City, N. Y. G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. BEN F. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. MARIE A. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) GEORGE W. WILDER, 329 West 108th St., New York, N. Y. GERTRUDE C. WILDER, 329 West 108th St., New York, N. Y. JULIA MARLOWE, Hotel Walton, Philadelphia, Pa. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. JOHN ADAMS THAYER, Westport, Conn. JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE, 128 W. 59th St., New York, N. Y. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1916. A. P. SCHOEN, Notary Public. (My commission expires March 30th, 1917.) [Seal.]

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1917
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The MAN FACTORY A COMPLETE NOVEL



KATHRENE
and ROBERT PINKERTON

Authors of "The Iron Factor," "Guiding Clementine," etc.

CHAPTER I

RAW MATERIAL

THE red sun slipped into the black spruce behind them, but Roger Strang never altered his steady, monotonous, endurance-testing pace. He had begun it two hours before that same sun had slipped out of the spruce only a little way on the other side of the meridian.

Behind him, single file in the deep furrow which the long webs on his feet had made, came the six dogs, tired, quiet, patiently straining between the traces that stretched back to the snow-covered toboggan and its tightly-lashed load. Still farther back, limping, unsteady, plodded Keith Verner, his snow-shoes clattering against each other on the smooth, hard trail left by the heavy toboggan.

With the setting of the sun the cold came

as suddenly as a shaft of light. The steaming breath of the dogs turned to frost on shoulders and chests. A more strident note crept into the creaking of the toboggan. The two men, their clothing damp from perspiration, felt as if they had just stepped from a warm room. The very redness of the sky above the departed sun was cold.

Darkness brought one change in the procession of men and dogs. Strang pressed on steadily, mechanically. An occasional backward glance assured him there were no laggards in the team. But Verner, as the deep trench in the snow lost its clear outlines, stumbled more frequently, and gradually the distance between him and the toboggan increased.

It had been dark for more than an hour before Strang finally swerved toward the black line of a point which showed against the snow-covered ice on the left. Ten minutes later he broke through the fringe of small spruce on the shore, tramped the

brush aside with his snow-shoes and pressed on into the gloom for a few feet.

"That'll do, puppies," he said as he stopped in a small open space. "Take it along a little farther. There. Whoa!"

Immediately he began to unhitch the dogs and remove the harness. Then, after he had unlashed the cover over the toboggan-load, he picked up his whip and faced the team.

They had gathered in a half-circle, ears up, mouths open, eyes eager, muscles twitching, long, red, dripping tongues slipping in and out between clean, white tusks. Strang thrust one hand into a bag at the rear of the toboggan.

"Bay-zhick!" he called, and the big, gray leader leaped at him, snatched a fish from his master's hand and wheeled, growling, to face the others. Simultaneously the other five started forward, to stop only when the whip cracked in their faces.

"Ah-nees!" called Strang, and another dog sprang instantly. In less than a minute each had received his fish, but, before the last had been served, Bay-zhick had finished and was back seeking an opportunity to deprive the wheel dog of his meal.

"Here, Bay-zhick!" commanded Strang after he had tied the fish-sack.

The leader came quickly and flopped on his back in the snow while his master examined his feet and slapped his ribs. In turn each dog was inspected, petted, given a kind word. Then Strang took off his snow-shoes and began to shovel away the snow with one of the webs. He quickly cut some wood, started a fire and hung a kettle of snow over the blaze. With a few clips of the ax he dropped a half-dozen small spruces, cut off the limbs with long, raking slashes, laid the poles beside the fire and thatched them with some of the boughs.

The tea-water was boiling, the frozen beans and pork had been heated and were sizzling in the frying-pan, and the bread had thawed, when Verner finally pushed his way through the brush and stopped beside the fire. For a moment he stood there, looking down into the blaze. Then he sat down, half falling as he did so, for he did not remove his snow-shoes.

Strang did not look up. Neither spoke. The beans were done, the tea made. Roger placed the frying-pan between them, laid a knife on each side, hung the two cups in the tea-pail, opened the sugar-sack and sat

down. Still without speaking they ate their supper, Strang quickly, Verner curbing with better success his impatient hunger.

When the pipes were lighted Verner began to remove his snow-shoes. One at a time he tossed them back into the snow. Strang had not ceased to gaze at the fire as he puffed at his pipe, nor did he look away as he spoke.

"Better knock the snow from them and stand them up," he said. "They'll be in better shape by morning."

"At least I can do as I please with my own snow-shoes," retorted the other.

Strang did not reply. When he had finished his pipe he slipped on his mittens and began to cut firewood. After he had a sufficient pile he made a large, thick, soft bed of the spruce branches. From the toboggan he brought two eider-down robes and tossed them on to the bed. Verner immediately took one, spread it out and lay down.

Strang hung up the dog harness, swung the fish and his own provisions high up in trees out of reach of the dogs, built up the fire, washed the dishes and at last sat down and again filled his pipe.

His face was stern, his eyes hard, but his voice was low and even when at last he spoke.

"We've been out eight days now. In those eight days you haven't broken a foot of trail, haven't done one minute's work. You have made more work for me, given the dogs more to haul. Altogether, you are as useless as I thought you would be. From now on you begin to do your share."

"I offered to do my share by paying all the expenses of this trip and any wages you wanted to ask," returned Verner quietly. "I'm not accustomed to this sort of thing, and I don't care about it."

With the reference to payment Strang's self-control vanished, and he turned angrily to the other.

"Don't mention wages or expenses to me again," he commanded. "I was ready to start on this trip alone before you came, before I knew any one would come. Despite two lessons, you don't seem to have learned that you and your money don't amount to much in this country. I don't know which is of the least value. When Miss Manning and her father did not appear at Norway House at the time specified, you started to look for them in the same way you would have hired a private detective agency to

find some one lost in Chicago. You thought money would do everything. Perhaps it will down there, but up here in the bush it's the least valuable thing there is.

"Your men quit on you as soon as they got you to my post. I wouldn't have blamed them if they had left you any old place on the shore. Then you tried to hire me, hire me to go out and save the lives of two people who have been lost for two months and who may be past saving now. You thought your money was still good, but I took you along only because you said you are engaged to Miss Manning. I didn't want to. It was against my better judgment. But I thought the fact you cared for her would make you attempt, at least, to do your share. You haven't even tried. If there were any way of getting rid of you, I'd do it right now."

"I don't doubt but that you would," replied Verner insolently as he sat up and moved nearer the fire. "Miss Manning and her father stopped at your post for some time. They employed the Indians there who took them into this country and then deserted them. Or, at least, that is what you say. From the beginning you have shown an unusual interest in this expedition, an unusual activity, but you haven't shown good judgment.

"I wanted to get more men, men to do the work, but you put me off with the statement that they were not to be had within a hundred miles and that there wasn't time. Since we started you have been driving ahead at a pace which it has not been possible for me to maintain. You have tried to wear me out, to get me to quit. Altogether, there is only one explanation that I can see. You want to make a hit with Miss Manning and you are trying to get all the glory of her rescue."

Strang leaned over until his frosted, stubble-covered chin was thrust into Verner's face. In his eyes was more anger, more hatred, than he had shown since the journey began. His hands were clenched, one on the spruce-boughs beside Verner, the other on his knee.

"You rotten, yellow, contemptible—" he began, the words being forced between teeth that were tightly clenched.

Verner shrank back, but he had hardly moved before Strang, too, drew away and looked at the fire.

Two things had stopped the fur trader's

angry denunciation. The first was an ever-present, oppressing realization of why he was making such a journey. Somewhere in the wilderness ahead of him, not far now, perhaps the next day, two people were waiting, waiting for him and his food and warm robes and snow-shoes, things that meant life. Perhaps even then he was too late. That fear was always with him, oppressed him even now in his anger.

Strang knew only too well the sapping, poisoning power of rage. He needed every bit of his strength, and he was a little ashamed even for the contempt in which he held this partner in his enterprise, this man who, through eight long days, had served only as a hindrance, a constant, irritating, delaying vexation.

The second reason for the quick subjection of his rage was even more powerful and was made known in his next words. Still looking at the fire, he spoke in a low voice, in a tone in which anger was succeeded by a strain of bitter hopelessness.

"I wouldn't let you or any man stand between me and the woman I wanted, Verner. But don't worry. You're safe. I can never ask a woman to marry me, never."

Verner laughed.

"That statement is hardly necessary," he said. "At least, I can't imagine a girl, especially Miss Manning, caring to live in this country and at such a desolate place as your trading-post."

"It isn't that," replied Strang almost as if speaking to himself. "I didn't always run that post, didn't always live in this country."

All the anger was gone from his voice, all the fierceness from his bearing. Verner glanced at him shrewdly and again laughed softly.

"The men who can't come back," he said. "I knew you were from the States."

Strang did not seem to have heard. Verner, confident now, drew closer to the dying blaze.

"We might have a little more fire," he suggested.

"Build it yourself," snapped Strang harshly, back again in the present. "Cut some more wood and build it up. Leave that pile alone. It's for morning. From now on you're going to be something more than a passenger."

Verner only smiled and huddled closer to the blaze. Strang, with one movement, was

on his feet. He reached down, grasped Verner's collar and yanked him to a standing position. As quickly he whirled the struggling man about and slapped his face.

"Get busy!" he commanded roughly, at the same time shoving Verner away from him.

Verner stumbled, caught himself and turned uncertainly. For a moment he glared at the man across the fire, his hatred so intense it lifted him above his fear.

In the half darkness the two faced each other. The dogs, which had been sleeping in the snow, sprang to their feet and circled about in the gloom. Their threatening maneuvers, the stillness of the dark forest, the cold that never released its grip, the menacing figure of the man across the fire, all combined to wipe out instantly whatever resistance he had intended. Meekly, Verner picked up the ax and began to cut firewood.

CHAPTER II

THIN ICE

THE next morning it was Verner who started ahead of the dogs. For two hours Strang kept him at it, remorseless in his insistence that the pace be faster, unrelenting when he saw the other waver from sheer weariness. At last Verner stopped and turned. Though it was cold, the perspiration ran down from under his heavy cap to freeze on his eyebrows. His legs trembled from the exhaustion of breaking trail. His eyes were sullen.

"You take your turn," he protested.

"I had my turn for eight days!" snapped Strang. "It's yours now."

Verner turned and started again, but after half a mile he stopped. Strang, with an oath, leaped into the snow beside the toboggan and plowed furiously to the head of the team.

"Get out of the way!" he shouted as he neared Verner. "They may be out of grub and we haven't even a trace of them yet."

He shoved Verner aside, and that exhausted young man toppled backward into the snow. Then, striding forward furiously, Strang took up the trail-breaking, and the dogs, looking in wonder at the man who struggled to right himself in the drift, followed obediently.

The sun was just coming up as Strang

went ahead, and in the next two hours he never slackened his pace. The last two miles he had led the way up a river with endless turnings between spruce-covered banks. Once open water showed ahead where a tributary tumbled into the main stream, and Strang turned to the shore and went around it. Out on the ice again he stopped the dogs.

Verner was a hundred yards behind, toiling slowly along. Strang went back to the toboggan, slipped his rifle from under the lashings, placed a box of cartridges in his hip-pocket and waited for the other to come up.

"Stay here with the dogs," he commanded when Verner halted a few feet from him. "Don't go on any farther. Last Winter an Indian had his wigwam on a little lake a mile up this creek. I'm going to see if he is still there and if he knows anything about them. There's another creek flows into the river a mile farther on, and I may cross over to that and come down it. There's a chance of fresh meat in there. But you wait here until I come back."

He turned, climbed the bank and left the other sitting on the toboggan load.

For an hour Verner sat there. In that time, and in those surroundings, he experienced all the emotions which his situation aroused. At first there was only anger and hatred for Strang. Then came incredulous wonder that he should be in such a position, that he should have allowed the other man to get the upper hand, a thing so unprecedented it did not seem possible.

When he did think of Allison Manning, the girl for whom he had left Chicago, it was with a slight resentment rather than fear for her safety. He had objected from the first when she had insisted on accompanying her father into the country north and east of Lake Winnipeg in a search for the nest of the Canadian jay.

It had been a new sensation for him to be refused. For two generations a Verner did not know what refusal was, had never experienced the denial of a wish, had never been thwarted. The original Verner had built a fortune by bulldog aggressiveness. His son and grandson had continued in his steps, softened, it is true, by what is commonly known as culture and refinement, but hard, driving, conquering men.

But, if the first Verner had combined ingenuity with aggressiveness, the trait had

not continued in the line. After Keith Verner's father had assumed control of the great business the day of the expert and the specialist arrived. He bought brains for special purposes, soon for every purpose, and his son, taking his place at an early age, had the habit. In Chicago there were no obstacles to such a course. Everything was to be bought, everything except the wonderfully attractive daughter of the ornithological professor at the University of Chicago. Here something of the first Verner had forced itself to the surface, and Keith had won through sheer aggressiveness.

Only his victory had not been complete. Allison Manning had said she would marry him, but she considered that she owed her father something and that his life's happiness depended upon the success of his excursion into the Hudson Bay country in search of specimens for the university, and especially in search of the nest of the Canadian jay. She knew that her scientific, absent-minded sire could never succeed without her managerial direction. And so, despite Verner's pleas, she had made the trip.

Probably only Roger Strang realized what her presence meant to Professor Manning. They had stopped at his post on the shore of Lake Winnipeg for a month, making several little excursions into the interior. He saw that every detail was in her hands, that she made all arrangements, accepted all responsibility, foresaw everything. Meanwhile, the professor was free to pursue his various searches and was happy.

But Allison had made one mistake. Contrary to Strang's advice, she had arranged a journey far to the eastward at a time of the year when their return by canoe was improbable, and with three half-breed guides of whom Roger did not approve. This was in the latter part of September. The October storms, the early frosts, came, and the Mannings did not return. Strang, believing they were held by the ice in small streams and lakes, did not worry until November came and there was no word from them. By that time it was impossible to travel until the ice had formed, and he waited impatiently for the first big freeze.

But, before the freeze came, Strang learned, through an Indian hunter, that two of the half-breed guides were trapping far north of his post. There was no word of Allison and her father.

Strang was ready to begin the search before the ice would bear him and his dogs, but, while waiting, Keith Verner arrived by way of the still open waters of the big lake. Fresh from Chicago and the scene of three generations of mastery, the young man from the States had, despite the mutiny of his guides, continued the same tactics. He had tried to hire Strang, tried to urge an immediate departure, resorted to bullying methods when refused and had ended it all by ungraciously taking advantage of Strang's reluctant permission to accompany him.

From the start, that first bitter morning in the driving snow, Strang had pressed on relentlessly. After the first day Verner believed that the other was trying to tire him out. Strang talked little at night. Verner, worn out by the unaccustomed exercise, tumbled onto his bough bed after supper and slept. He did not arise in the morning until breakfast was ready.

Strang, driven by his knowledge of what a northern Winter would mean to the professor and his daughter if they were still alive, fearing what he might find because he knew the half-breed guides, did not spare himself. At first he had been willing to bear the brunt. He knew it would be hard for Verner to work in. But, after a few days, when the other showed no signs of increasing his activities, when Strang's own nerves were becoming raw beneath the excessive physical strain, the young fur-trader had begun to display irritability.

All this Keith Verner considered, from his own viewpoint, as he sat on the toboggan. After the hard work of the morning his clothes were damp from perspiration and the cold began to bite through. The solitude, the desolation, the knowledge that he was alone, except for Strang, in an immense wilderness, awed him as nothing ever had before. For the first time in his life he felt small, insignificant, impotent.

But his very impotency aroused his resentment again, increased his hatred and contempt for the man who constantly humiliated him. The cold and his newly aroused anger drove him to his feet, and he paced up and down on the trail the toboggan had made.

The time flew by, or, to Verner, it seemed to have flown. Then it occurred to him that he did not have to stay there, that he, too, could travel, that he need not heed

Strang's commands. Resolutely, confidently, he put on his snow-shoes.

He strode ahead of the dogs, spoke sharply to get them to their feet, and then, the team behind him, set off up the river.



AFTER a quarter of a mile Verner began to tire of the heavy work of trail-breaking. He remembered, too, that Strang had told him not to go on. He had repeated that command. Verner thought of it as only part of the domineering attitude the other had assumed and, spurred by resentment, went faster than before. Head bent against the wind that swept down the river from the north, his legs working with all their strength as he crushed a way for the dogs, he pressed on.

At the end of another quarter of a mile he became conscious that his snow-shoes were lifting more heavily, that there was a suggestion of stickiness in his progress. He looked down to see slush gathering thickly over the webbing, forming great masses that froze when exposed to the cold air above the snow.

A few more steps and Verner saw the snow turn black beneath his right snow-shoe. He felt and heard water dripping as he lifted the web for the next step. When his left foot came down there was more elasticity than he had been accustomed to. Again he felt water, saw the snow turn black. His right foot sank more deeply. As he pulled it out, Keith realized what was happening. The ice was giving way beneath him.

Quickly, desperately, he turned and struggled with his ice-bound snow-shoes toward shore. He yelled as he started, and Bay-zhick, the leader of the team, stopped in wonder. He had not liked this new master anyhow.

Twice Verner broke through with one foot, but he floundered on until he felt the solid shore beneath his webs. Then, panting, gasping with relief, he turned to see the team standing in the middle of the river, the dogs lifting their feet and shaking off the slush or biting at the ice that quickly formed.

"Come here! Git up! Mush! Hurry up!"

Verner shouted his orders rapidly, excitedly, then frenziedly as the animals only stared at him in troubled wonder.

"Come, doggies!" he screamed. "Nice doggies! Mush, — you! Git up!"

Finally Bay-zhick started, feeling his way carefully and with all the wolf-dog's fear of water. The others followed, but the toboggan could not make the sharp turn where Verner had jumped from the middle of the stream. The slush froze to the bottom of it, and it came to a dragging halt. The dogs strained, but it would not move.

Slowly, yet with an ominous certainty, it began to settle. Verner renewed his frenzied commands, and then the toboggan suddenly disappeared and only a black hole showed where it had been.

"Grab the leader!" came a sharp command from up-stream, and Verner turned to see Strang running toward him, the dry snow flying in a cloud before his webs.

"Grab the leader!" repeated Strang, but Verner only drew back, for Un-ga-do-sa, the wheel dog, had just gone under, whining and struggling frantically.

Verner took a hesitating step forward. Then Non-en, the next dog, slipped into the hole, drawing the others back with him. The four dogs still out of water were pulling with all their strength now, but the heavy toboggan, drawn under by the current, was more than they could move.

The third dog went down, and Verner retreated to the shore.

Strang, shouting, swearing, running madly, was now only fifty yards away.

"You yellow cur!" he cried. "Get the leader. It's the only chance!"

But Verner did not move. The slowly engulfing water held him fear-bound. Nee-win slipped back, struggling to the last. And then, just as Strang reached the spot, the other three suddenly were drawn toward the hole, the ice gave way beneath them, and only a long, dark gash showed on the level surface of the snow, a deep trench at the bottom of which the black water slipped past with the hideous motion of a monster serpent.

Strang took off his snow-shoes, laid them on top of a drift and sat upon them. His chest was heaving from the supreme exertion of his dash down the river through the deep snow. His shoulders hung forward, his hands dangling between his knees.

His anger appeared to have vanished, however. In its place was the immense void of hopelessness. Strang's woods experience, his knowledge of the country, his complete realization of the situation in which Professor Manning and his daughter

must be if they were still alive, all combined to make his despair complete.

When he had started from his trading-post his fears for them were greater than he had admitted even to himself. Now, without dogs, without food, without sleeping-robcs, without any of the things so necessary to travel in the North in Winter, he knew he could do nothing should he find them. Even the snow-shoes he had brought that they might travel were gone. There was nothing, nothing except himself, his rifle and twenty-five cartridges.

The trader did not denounce Verner. He was too busy thinking of other possibilities, of what should be done. He had been in the wilderness too long to plan on "ifs," to accept anything except realities. But, when his active mind had finally grasped every last detail of the situation and he approached the normal again, he turned to the young man, who still stood looking at the deep, black gash in the snow.

"If you had grabbed that leader and held on until I got here, we might have saved something," said Strang casually. "Now we haven't got anything. I didn't even find the Indian—you didn't stay where I told you."

"How would I know there was bad ice here?" flared Verner.

"You wouldn't," was the calm reply. "That's why I told you to wait until I came back. Now we haven't any grub, any robes, any dogs, any toboggan. We're nine days from the post, and we haven't even a trace of them."

Verner did not answer. His ignorance of the wilderness had not permitted a complete realization of the catastrophe until the other had made it clear.

"What would you do now?" asked Strang.

"There is only one thing to do. Go back to your post and get a new outfit. We could get there in half the time it took us to get this far, with the trail broken all the way, couldn't we?"

"Yes, if it didn't snow and fill it up," was the speculative reply.

"And with the trail still open we could be back this far in eight or nine days with a new outfit."

"Yes, if there was an outfit ready. But, you see, I haven't another dog-team, and there's none within a good many miles of the post."

"But we've got to go back anyhow," de-

clared Verner emphatically. "We'll only starve sitting here, and we can't help them if we find them."

For a moment Strang did not answer. He sat staring at the long hole in the ice through which the dogs and outfit had gone. His eyes drifted back down-stream, following, in his imagination, the course of the struggling, choking, dying beasts which had long served him so well and which had occupied something more than the place of work-animals in his lonely life at the trading-post. He choked with anger for a moment, but when he spoke it was still quietly, casually.

"Verner," he said, "I knew from the first time I saw you that you were a yellow dog. There wasn't one of those brutes that went into that hole that wasn't a better man than you are.

"I've heard of you, you and your family, as 'most every one else has. You've been buying and bluffing and bullying your way through everything just as your father and your grandfather did. Only your grandfather had something you never had, and never will have. You haven't got the nerve of an Indian cur.

"That might be overlooked if it weren't for something else. You thought you could come up here and grandstand your way through to a thrilling rescue, hiring some one to do the work as you always have done. But now, when you're up against it, when there isn't any one to hire, when it's you and you alone, you turn your tail and run. You forget all about them, waiting, if they're alive, for some one to come for them. Maybe they're starving right now. Maybe they finished the last bit of grub yesterday, or the day before. Maybe they're around the next bend in the river, lying there too weak to move, too far gone to keep a fire going.

"And you, with your belly full, with good clothes on you, with snow-shoes and legs and arms and the shape of a man, you think only of how soon you can get back to a stove and something to eat and blankets to keep out the cold at night.

"The professor may be strong on science, but you know what sort he is otherwise. He's as helpless as a baby. Everything that will be done, all the work, the schemes, the privations, the sacrifices, will be hers. And you——"

Strang had still been speaking calmly,

dispassionately. But he suddenly jumped to his feet and strode toward Verner.

"You—you gutless bunch of slime!" he cried. "You'd let her do it, let her go on fighting until the end came, while you were beating it the other way hunting for a meal and a bed. — you! I'm going to throw you into that hole!"

Verner retreated in terror before the infuriated rush of the trader. Instantly Strang stopped and, with a laugh, turned back to his snow-shoes. Quickly he slipped them on and took his back trail to where he had dropped his rifle in the snow. Carefully and slowly he wiped the weapon dry with his mittens, tore open the box of cartridges he carried in his hip-pocket and examined them.

Then, with a quick glance at the sun, another at his watch, he turned and went on into the north and east with the same steady, mechanical movement of his snow-shoes that had broken a trail for the dogs.

Behind him on the river-bank Verner stood staring. He finally turned and looked at the back trail, the well-beaten, hard, smooth path that led on to warmth and comfort and food.

Then came the thought of the long, weary days, the endless miles, that intervened. He remembered the interminable stretches of muskeg, lakes, rivers, forests, the cold and the loneliness, the silent, unseen, ever-haunting menaces that moved on either side.

Strang was just turning the next bend. He was going on anyhow, keeping up the fight. The very swing of his webs compelled respect. The carriage of his shoulders instilled courage. Verner turned resolutely and followed.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAIL'S END

DESPITE his anger, Roger Strang was level-headed enough to know that to continue the search for Professor Manning and his daughter without any equipment whatever was both quixotic and suicidal. He knew thoroughly what it meant to be alone in the forest without blankets or food. He knew how helpless he would be should he find them alive.

Neither was it because he was the sort of man who keeps on fighting so long as he stands on his feet. The strictly humanita-

rian desire to help two people in danger of death would have drawn him on regardless of the consequences. But, in the face of what he believed to be complete disaster, he frankly admitted to himself that Allison Manning alone would forbid his turning back should all other reasons fail.

The mere thought of her increased his pace, and it was not until he had turned several bends in the river that he looked back to see whether Verner were following him. The other was not in sight, and Roger merely shrugged his shoulders and went on.

One thing encouraged him. He and Allison Manning had discussed the route thoroughly before the start of the ill-fated expedition. He had made a map of the lakes and rivers for her himself, drawing in carefully every landmark, noting falls, rapids, portages, swamps and ridges.

He had mapped only the route she intended to take, had not drawn in any side trips, lakes or rivers. He believed that his warning against the three half-breed guides had had some effect, even though she had chosen to employ them anyhow, and he did not think that, willingly, she would permit them to deviate from the mapped route.

Thus there was one big hope to spur him on. If the best had happened, if the guides had only deserted their employers, Allison and her father would be stranded somewhere on the route he had mapped. And he was nearing the end of it.

From his knowledge of the breeds, and of Allison's capabilities, he more than hoped that desertion on the part of the guides was the sole reason for the failure of the party to return. The two who were trapping north of his post were merely tools of the third. Had there been any serious crime, he knew they would not have remained near the scene of it.

Roger had thought all these things out many times since leaving his trading-post, but he went over them thoroughly again in the first hour after he had left the place where the dogs and toboggan had gone through the ice. Despite the black outlook, both for himself and for those he sought, his deductions left him more hopeful than before, and he swept out on to the better going of a long lake with greater cheerfulness than for several days.

The sun was setting as he reached the other shore, and he turned to see a black

dot on the ice far behind him. He smiled and went on, following a portage trail.

Strang did not think of Verner long. The portage he was traversing led to the last little lake he had mapped for Allison Manning. He did not believe she and her father had gone beyond it. If they were alive, they were somewhere on the shore of the lake. If they were not there they were dead, for there had been no traces behind him.

But, though eager for what he hoped to find before darkness came, the fur-trader was not prepared for the scene unfolded by a sudden bend in the trail.

Crouching behind a tree, his body bent and tense, a club poised above his head, was Professor Manning. Before him, balanced on a windfall, was a short pole. On the end farthest away was a bit of red meat. Two feet above this, examining the meat greedily, was a Canadian jay.

As Strang looked, the bird fluttered down in that soft, silent, fluffy, ghostly way peculiar to it. But, as its feet touched the pole, the professor brought down his club on the other end of it. The bird shot high in the air to drop, a soft mass of feathers, into the snow.

As the scientist, his face breaking into an exultant smile, sprang forward to get his victim, Strang started toward him. Professor Manning, hearing the crunch of snowshoes, glanced toward the trader but did not stop.

"I did it!" he cried as he turned toward Strang with the dead bird in his hands. "I killed one in the manner the old-time Michigan lumbermen are said to have done. My story of *Perisoreus canadensis* is now complete."

"I'll bet there is one thing you haven't found out, professor," said Strang, smiling at the other's failure to realize what his coming meant.

"My investigations have been very thorough, sir. The last two months have given me abundant opportunity to study the birds."

"Well," replied Strang, "I'd like to see you try this. They say that, if you catch a moose bird, or whisky-jack, or lumberjack, or camp-robber, or that name you gave it, and pull out its tail-feathers, you'll lose all your hair within a year."

"Bah!" exclaimed the professor. "Mere superstition."

"Maybe so, but there are few fellows in the bush who would ever touch a feather of one of the birds, and I've been told of one man who did it and became bald within a year."

"Mere superstition," repeated the professor. "Mere superstition, sir. Utterly absurd."

"Perhaps," replied Strang, still smiling at the other's complete absorption in his work even though death waited around a bend in the trail. "How are you and Miss Manning?"

"As well as might be expected. I've been doing a great deal of valuable research. It has been too bad that we were in a position that made it necessary to economize on food."

"Then you still have something?" asked Strang eagerly.

"We used the last of the flour yesterday. There are still a few pounds of beans and rice, a little sugar and some tea. We are depending largely upon rabbit. Allison won't touch the other food."

"How long have you been living on rabbit?"

"Probably a month now."

"What happened to those breed guides?"

"There was some trouble over their going back and they deserted us six weeks ago."

"Did they get nasty about it?"

"They would have, I think, but Allison controlled them."

"Strang turned and went on, the professor following.

"Quite an idea, that," he commented as he saw the comparative ease with which Strang moved ahead through the deep snow with his webs. "I wish I might have had a pair these last two or three weeks."

But Roger did not reply. From the professor's absent-minded, uninterested comments, he had caught a glimpse of what the daughter must have done in the six weeks since the guides had left them. Alone, unaided, she had fought the Northern wilderness at the beginning of a Northern Winter with the most meager weapons and no experience. He knew that the scientist, interested in his work, would be of little or no assistance; that Allison, protecting, directing, would assume all the responsibility.

But even with his knowledge of the girl's capabilities and of what she faced, the fur-trader was not prepared for what she had

accomplished. Instead of the tent in which he had expected to find them shivering, there stood a roomy wigwam of birch bark with smoke rising upward in the still, cold air from the hole in the peak. Before the door, made of a piece of tent cloth, was a neat pile of wood, mostly broken branches of dead poplar and spruce windfalls. In trees near the wigwam hung the dressed and frozen bodies of a dozen rabbits.



AS ROGER plowed forward eagerly he could not repress a call. Instantly the flap was thrust back and Allison appeared.

"You!" she cried. "I thought you were never coming!"

She ran forward through the snow, both hands outstretched, her lips smiling, the tears beginning to show in her eyes.

"We started as soon as the ice would permit," he replied as he shook hands, and then he smiled as he glanced around. "But it looks as though you handled things pretty well alone."

"I did the best I could," laughed the girl. The shock of Strang's arrival was so great there was just a trace of hysteria as the tears ran down the creases her laughter made. Then she suddenly became serious.

"But we couldn't have lasted much longer. Our provisions are about gone, and I have snared all the rabbits near here."

"I'm afraid we won't be of much help, only an added number of mouths to feed. We lost our entire outfit through the ice today."

"We? There are others coming?"

"Mr. Keith Verner, of Chicago, is back on the trail. He will be here soon."

"Keith! Here! Came to find us?"

For a moment she stared incredulously at Strang and then looked down the trail by which he had come.

"I can't believe it," she half whispered.

Strang looked at her with a puzzled expression. She saw it and went on quickly.

"I never associated Keith with anything like this. He is so essentially a city product. He doesn't know anything else because he doesn't care about anything else. I suppose he worried because he didn't hear from us."

"That is what he said. What happened to the guides?"

"You were right," she said frankly. "They were a bad lot."

"I'm glad they didn't do anything more than desert you, though that's about the height of crime in this country."

"Oh, they tried it. Louis was the leader. He made the others believe that father was on some mysterious errand and would drive all the game from the country with his 'bad medicine.' Then he came to me and demanded two hundred dollars to keep the others at work. Of course, I refused, and then, when we got here, he repeated his demand, saying that the others were afraid of father and would leave us.

"I knew what he was doing, frightening the other two, and I told him so. That night I was suspicious and remained awake. I caught them trying to leave with both canoes and all the supplies. Louis was going to carry it through by force, but I threatened to shoot him with my .22 and also said something about father's 'big medicine.' That scared the other two, and I let them go with one canoe, their tent, blankets and three days' food. For a while I feared they would come back in the night, but they haven't appeared since, and I haven't worried about them."

Strang did not reply as he twisted his feet out of his snow-shoes and hung them in a tree. He did not even look the admiration he felt for the girl who had shielded her father from all knowledge of the risks she had taken.

"You've done wonderfully well," he said as he examined the wigwam she had built.

"I made it because I knew we would need it to keep warm when colder weather came," she explained.

She spoke calmly, as if it had been nothing, but Strang knew the work necessary to gather the huge sheets of birch-bark and to sew slats at each end with root thongs.

"Come inside," she added, opening the flap. "It gets so cold the minute the sun drops out of sight."

Strang found two bough beds on either side of the fire. Blankets were folded neatly back out of the way. On the far side were several pitifully small bags which, he knew, contained food. He smelled rabbit simmering in the pot swung over the blaze.

One side was heaped high with the professor's collections and paraphernalia. The girl's small rifle lay on her blankets and before them was a pile of strings of fur.

"You were even making a rabbit-skin

blanket!" Strang exclaimed, this time failing to mask his admiration.

"Father was not sleeping well because of the cold," she explained simply.

Professor Manning, who had already entered the wigwam and was busy skinning the bird he had killed by means of the old lumberjack ruse, looked up.

"I regret that we have no thermometer," he said. "It would be interesting to keep temperature data. Do you know how cold it has been?"

"It hasn't even begun to get cold yet," laughed Strang. "Wait a week or two."

He saw Allison looking speculatively at him and added—

"But we will get out before the worst of it comes."

"Hello!" came a voice from outside, and Allison rushed out of the door.

"Keith!" Strang heard her cry.

"Well, thank God you're alive," Verner answered. "What on earth happened?"

"We were deserted by our guides and couldn't go back alone because the river began to freeze. But why did you come all this way to look for us?"

"What else was there for me to do? I didn't want you to come, I didn't approve of it. But that is no reason why I shouldn't come to find you when you were lost."

"Hush," she whispered. "Mr. Strang is inside. Poor boy! You're tired and hungry. Wasn't it too bad about the equipment?"

"I suppose he told you all about it," exclaimed Verner angrily. "And told it well! But it wasn't my fault. How was I to know the ice was rotten there? If he had been ahead it would have been the same thing, only he would have had a different story to tell. I knew he would reach here first so as to get in his alibi."

"Why, Keith," she protested. "What do you mean? Mr. Strang said nothing about any one being to blame. Come inside where it is warm. You're tired out."

Angry with himself, more angry than before with Strang, Verner followed Allison into the dark, smoky wigwam.

"How do you do, my boy!" greeted the professor as he rose and extended his hand. "It is fortunate that you arrived when you did."

"I should have been here sooner," replied the young man, "but I could not get the

equipment I believed necessary. We'll get out, though."

Allison turned inquiringly to Strang, but he was sitting beside the fire and not looking up.

"We can get out quickly, can't we, Mr. Strang?" she asked.

"I would like to hope so, Miss Manning," he replied slowly. "We'll talk over plans later this evening."

"There is only one possible plan," declared Verner emphatically. "You should start at once in search of men, dogs and toboggans to get us out of here."

The trader flushed but did not answer. Allison looked searchingly from one to the other. She seemed to sense the hostility that existed between them, as much from Strang's evident repression as from Verner's open stand.

"Can you get help, Mr. Strang?" she asked, and then added: "In time?"

He looked up at her quickly, appraisingly. Suddenly he had realized the situation. It was this girl and himself against the wilderness, against the Winter. The professor could not be counted upon. Nor was Verner of more value. They two, they together, must make the fight, must make the plans, the sacrifices, do the work. And, at the end, if they did get out safely, that partnership would dissolve, their common purpose would be ended, and Verner would take his place.

Past experiences in the northland painted the picture for him—the cold, the blizzards, the hunger, the despair, the short, futile days, the long, terror-filled nights. And through it all, fighting beside him, would be this splendid girl, sharing, aiding, encouraging, spurring him on by her very presence when all hope was gone.

For a moment he revolted at the inevitable ending of it all, the ending that the love of life demanded. And then his own statement to Verner that night on the trail came to him. He had no right to her. The best he could hope to do would be to serve her. She had fought hard so far. She was entitled to her life.

Again he looked at the girl, to see the same steady, brave look. His heart leaped, and when he spoke it was only to her, without thought of the others.

"I don't think we should minimize anything in our plans," he said slowly. "We face a difficult situation, and the better

understanding of it we have the better we will be prepared to meet it.

"Frankly, we are in a very serious predicament. There is food for only a few days. It is impossible for all of us to travel without snow-shoes and a toboggan to haul what outfit we have."

"But you can travel," interrupted Verner. "You can get out for help."

The fur-trader was only human. He turned on the man savagely.

"Hear that?" he demanded. And they listened to a long sigh of wind through the forest. "That is the start of a three-day blizzard. No one can travel in the storm that will be here by morning. And, even if I had food to make the trip, you would starve before I returned. Such a plan would be plain suicide."

"You mean," asked Allison quickly, "that we must stay here, all of us?"

"Stay here until we kill our own food, make our own snow-shoes, sleeping-ropes and toboggan. Then we can all start out together and, with good luck, reach a place of safety."

CHAPTER IV

PLANNING THE FIGHT

ALLISON prepared the supper that night. The rabbits were half done when Strang and Verner arrived and she wanted to make an occasion of the meal by having some boiled rice.

"Fine!" exclaimed Verner. "I haven't eaten since breakfast, and I haven't had anything except beans and bread for a week."

But as Allison lifted the little sack of rice, Strang put out his hand and felt of it.

"We don't need that," he said, "and we may later. Verner and I haven't had any fresh meat, and the rabbit will be a treat."

"At least we can have tea," protested Allison. "We must do something to celebrate our rescue."

"All right," laughed Strang, "but go easy on it. It is a fine thing to keep for a time when a stimulant will come in handy."

So they feasted on tea and rabbit, Allison describing the mutiny of the guides and her subsequent efforts to make themselves comfortable until the rescue party, which she knew would come, had arrived.

"You should have made them take you

out," declared Verner when she told of the breeds' departure.

Allison smiled.

"They are a little different from taxi-drivers, Keith," she said.

"And they displayed a shocking lack of knowledge of many things about the birds of the country," interrupted Professor Manning. "I could get very little information from them."

"That is because they can't sell their hides," explained Strang.

"It seems to me that the most important thing is, how are we going to save our own hides?" broke in Verner irritably. "I am in favor of sending Strang at once to get food and dogs to haul us out. We can't continue to live like this, and on such fare."

He dropped the half-eaten hind leg of a rabbit into the fire and began to fill his pipe.

"Oh!" exclaimed Allison. "You mustn't be so wasteful. The rabbits are about all gone. Besides, Mr. Strang says it would not be feasible for him to attempt to get out and bring help."

"It's more feasible than for us to remain here until we die. He can catch his own rabbits on the way."

"Perhaps you had better try it," said Strang quietly.

"You know very well that I am not accustomed to this sort of thing, that it's something I don't know anything about."

"Exactly," replied the fur-trader quickly. "This is something which your experience and knowledge do not reach. We may as well settle this whole thing right now. I have lived here five years and in that time have made a great many trips, Summer and Winter. Perhaps I may be permitted to explain the situation in which we find ourselves."

He looked around the fire inquiringly.

"Yes," said Allison. "Let's start at the beginning and figure the whole thing out. That's scientific, isn't it, father?"

"Perfectly," agreed the professor. "I have every confidence in Mr. Strang. It seems to me, my dear, that he warned us against Louis and his men, did he not?"

"I am the one who refused to heed that advice," she replied frankly. "And, I suppose, the blame for all this rests on me."

"Not at all," interposed Strang. "But here are the facts of our present situation, and that is the only thing that concerns us. We are about one hundred and fifty

miles from my place by the shortest way, two hundred by the way Verner and I came on your route. There is not a Hudson's Bay Company post any nearer. The country through here is not very rich in fur and there are not many Indian hunters. If I knew where one had his district it would solve the problem. But I don't know of any near here.

"All three of you are just getting a taste of your first northern Winter. You'll have a better idea of what it is three days from now, when you have passed through your first blizzard. I am sure Mr. Verner will see then why I say it is impossible to travel while it lasts. And after the blizzard it will clear up and the temperature will drop to fifty or more below zero. You can travel then, but you would suffer in doing so.

"Another thing. This intense cold, and the exertion of travel, or even keeping warm here in the wigwam, requires a large amount of food. You have enough, Miss Manning, to keep us going, on slim rations, for six days. With the rabbits, we could get along for two days more. That means eight days' supplies on hand, scanty supplies, and it is not enough to reach my place or a Hudson's Bay post.

"There is also the question of shelter and bedding. In this wigwam it is possible to be comfortable. But it would be impossible for us to travel with the few blankets we have. Even Miss Manning and her father could not keep warm at night with all of them, for we can't have shelter."

"Then," interrupted Verner, "according to your opinion, there isn't enough food to keep us going, even if you did get out and return with help; there isn't enough food to last us here more than eight days, and all four of us can't travel out together because there isn't enough food, enough bedding and no snow-shoes for Allison and her father."

"And we have no toboggan to haul what we have," added Strang.

"Then we are in a position from which there is no escape?"

"I have outlined it as I see it," replied the fur-trader seriously, "not only that we may all understand it, but that we may all understand that it is very serious, and that the chances are really against us."

"Then we have a chance?" asked Allison quickly.

"Certainly. That is what I am coming to

now. This is what I would do: First, we must have two more pairs of snow-shoes and a toboggan. We must have food and sleeping robes."

"I'll order them at once," said Verner flippantly.

"You can help get them," replied Strang. "The caribou will furnish the snow-shoe webbing, the food and the sleeping-robes. There are enough birch for any number of snow-shoe frames and toboggans."

"I see!" exclaimed Allison excitedly. "We will fight our own way out of here, make the equipment we lack, kill the food we need, and, when we are ready, all go out together. But the caribou?"

"This is supposed to be a good district for them," explained Strang. "I didn't see a track on the way up, but that should not discourage us. They travel in herds and migrate long distances. If I am lucky enough to bump into a herd, I can get all we will need in ten minutes. On the other hand, I may have to hunt for some time, possibly weeks."

"Do you mean we've got to stay here and eat rabbit all that time?" asked Verner in dismay.

"We may be glad to have rabbit before we get something better. How many have you caught, Miss Manning?"

"At least a hundred. But there aren't any more near here."

"I'll find a swamp where we can get some. Another hundred or less will solve the robe question for you. I am glad, because an untanned caribou hide is not a pleasant thing to sleep in. It doesn't tuck in well."

Allison alone referred directly to the necessity of all four sleeping in the wigwam.

"I am glad I tore up the tents father and I had for clothes and things," she said. "Otherwise, you men would have insisted on sleeping in one of them, and you surely would have frozen."

Strang built up the fire, brought in several armfuls of wood and all prepared for bed. Allison and her father had four heavy blankets and immediately suggested that each take one.

"You will need both of yours," protested Strang. "I am used to this sort of thing and I can keep warm by the fire. Verner and your father can sleep together and be comfortable."

Both Professor Manning and Allison

protested, but Strang had his way. Allison spread her blankets, lay down, tucked them about her and was soon asleep. Professor Manning slept as quickly, Verner beside him, while Strang sat for a while beside the fire.

The fur-trader realized better than the others, even after his description of the dangers they faced, the situation in which the little party found itself. Unless one has passed through the worst of a Winter in northern latitudes, has faced the infinite problems that the mere sustenance of life entails, has endured the cold, fought the blizzards, broken long, difficult trails, there can not be complete realization of what such a plight means. Not alone is the physical hardship great, but the vastness of the wilderness, the oppression of the utter silence, the grip of the relentless cold, the days that are short and mocking, the nights that are interminable and brooding, each acts as a weight upon the mind itself, depressing, sapping, sometimes obliterating.

Roger Strang knew, too, the problem of the simple human relations under such conditions. With men only, each strong, capable, self-reliant, the strain is always great. With the four in the wigwam there was a field in which anything might grow.

But it was rather with the physical problems that he spent a silent hour beside the fire. Snow had begun to fall when he brought in the wood, and the tips of the spruces by which the wigwam was sheltered were bending before the wind. In the morning the blizzard would be at its height and probably for three days and three nights it would continue. Not until it had blown itself out could he hope to start after caribou.

There was the possibility that he would not succeed. Hunting in a strange country is always uncertain. But he ignored this contingency. He had to find them. Six or seven would be required, he decided, to furnish food, sleeping-robcs and snow-shoe webbing.

Luckily Miss Manning and her father were adequately clothed. Even early Fall in the northland requires garments suitable for Winter, and they had been well supplied with heavy mackinaws, woolen underclothing, shirts, socks and trousers, for Allison had had the good sense to discard skirts entirely since she had left civilization. They had moccasins for camp use, and these

would suffice for Winter wear. Verner and Strang were well clothed but with only what they had on. Everything else had gone through the ice with the dogs.

But the caribou, the caribou he must get, were Strang's principal concern. After he had killed them there would be much work in skinning, preparing the hides, hauling in the meat, making the equipment required. And he could count on little assistance. It was pretty much of a one-man fight, he decided, but, as he at last lay down to sleep, it was with a feeling of confidence.

With Allison Manning he could not fail. Somehow, he knew that, no matter what happened, he could depend upon her cheerfulness and courage. And he would be serving her, doing it for her. It was all he ever could do, but that did not detract from his joy.

Strang wakened the others in the morning with a call to breakfast.

"Hear the storm!" exclaimed Allison as she sat up in her blankets. "Will it blow like that for three days?"

"It generally does. But wait until you have been outside."

"Why, I can't lift the flap!" she cried after springing up and trying the door.

Strang laughed.

"I shoveled the snow away an hour ago," he said.

Immediately after breakfast Strang left the wigwam. For two hours he cut and carried wood to a pile before the door. Professor Manning was busy writing in a notebook, leaving Allison and Verner as much alone as if he were not there.

"You should not have come, Keith," said the girl. "We would have been all right."

"I had to. Nearly three months without word, and all my inquiries getting nothing."

"I'm sorry you worried, dear, but we'll get out soon now."

"I hope it's soon. This is an awful place for you to live in."

He turned impulsively and took her hand.

"And when we do get out, sweetheart, when we get out, we're going to be married at once, and there'll never be anything like this again."

"Oh, Keith!" she cried in mock dismay. "Wait until my hands are in shape at least. Wouldn't they look terrible, clasping a bouquet?"

She held them out, red, cracked, calloused.

He covered them with his own and drew her to him.



STRANG came in later with four roughly hewed pieces of birch.

"For snow-shoes?" asked Allison.

He nodded and looked at her critically.

"Do you think you could stand it outside for an hour?" he asked.

"Of course," she replied eagerly, springing up.

"I want to gather up your rabbit snares and, of course, I couldn't find them without you."

"That would be fun. I have twenty, all the wire father had for his work."

"I still have a coil that I kept hidden from her," offered the professor. "You are welcome to it."

"I can't even see!" Allison shouted from beneath the protection of Strang's shoulder when they were outside. "I couldn't find them in this."

He asked the location of the swamp in which she had sat her snares and led her to it. She found the end of her trail and in an hour each of the twenty snares had been dug out of the snow. There were only two rabbits in them.

"That means we must find a new swamp," said Strang as he turned back. "I'll take you to the wigwam and then go out and set these."

But Allison insisted on accompanying him.

"Besides," she added, "when you are hunting caribou, I will have to look after them."

It won him, this apparent elimination of Verner from their plans, and Strang, strangely exultant, assented. They made their way along the north shore of the lake for half a mile before they found a swamp that suited the trader. Then, setting each snare with as much care as though he were trying to catch a black fox, he went in from the lake until his wire was exhausted. Returning, he blazed a trail so that it could be followed easily.

"We won't get many until the storm is over and their runways are opened again," he explained as they started back. "They must all be reset then."

It was afternoon when they returned to find Verner sitting beside a struggling fire and the professor busy with his note-books.

"Where on earth have you been?" de-

manded Keith. "We thought you had been lost. It's way past lunch time."

Strang did not answer, while Allison dropped one of the frozen, snow-covered rabbits across Verner's neck.

"We've been getting that lunch," she told him with mock severity. "No rabbits, no meals."

Strang spent all afternoon whittling patiently and carefully at the strips of birch he had hewed in the morning. The professor worked at his notes, while Keith and Allison talked of things and people which interested them alone. Verner told her the news of the city since her departure in the Spring, the happenings to friends and acquaintances, marriages, deaths and gossip.

And so three days passed. There were not enough rabbits in the snares to keep the pot filled and it was necessary to draw on Allison's reserve supply. Strang finished the bows of all four snow-shoes and, with the kettle boiling furiously over a big bed of coals, steamed and bent them.

The morning of the fourth day Strang wakened in an unusual stillness. He pushed back the flap over the door and saw the stars shining through the tree-tops. Quietly he built up a fire and boiled three rabbits. As soon as they were cooked he set one out to freeze. Then he ate his own breakfast, wrapped the frozen rabbit in a piece of tent-cloth and tied it to his belt behind, took his rifle and went out.

The others wakened to find him gone. The day passed. Night came. Then morning, and another day and another night. Strang did not return.

CHAPTER V

A NEW DISASTER

THE first day of Strang's absence Allison, with Verner's snow-shoes, went out to look after her rabbit snares. She was gone for three hours, for it was necessary to reset each trap because of the snow that had fallen. And from the twenty-eight snares she obtained only two rabbits.

It was late when she started toward the wigwam, for it had been ten o'clock when she had left it, and Verner, floundering through the deep snow along the lake shore, met her halfway.

"You mustn't do such things, Allison!"

he exclaimed. "Let me go with you if you must go out this way, or, at least, tell us how long you are going to be gone."

The girl looked at him in silence for a moment. She saw that he was genuinely worried, that the relief upon finding her had slackened the nervous tension and made him irritable, a common masculine trait.

"I am sorry," she said, "but the work has to be done, and there is so much to do that there is no need of two doing the same thing. Did you get up any wood?"

"No. I can't do that sort of thing."

"We've all got to do a good many things we don't like to, Keith," she answered gently. "This is hardly a time for little, personal aversions. I'm only sorry that I am responsible for your being subjected to this. For that reason I am willing to do more than my share. But, now that we are in for it, the only thing to do is to take things as we find them and hurry the time when we will get out by each accepting part of the responsibility."

"Don't preach, dear. I know I don't fit in well here, but it gets on my nerves, this sitting down and waiting for something to happen, for somebody to do something."

"I know how hard it is for you, but this won't last forever. Cheer up and think of how comfortable you are going to be when you are back in Chicago."

"I suppose that is the only way to look at it. Thanks to this lesson, we'll not have another experience like it."

Professor Manning was gone when they returned and he did not come in for the midday meal which had awaited Allison's arrival. When the rabbit had been boiled and she and Verner had eaten their share the scientist lifted the flap and entered the wigwam.

"Father!" cried Allison, rising quickly. "You must be more careful. You've frozen your nose."

She began at once to rub it, while the professor, jerkily, because of the vigorous treatment, deplored his lack of a good thermometer.

"It is a most interesting question, this survival of such small birds and animals in such a temperature," he said when he had begun his meal. "I imagine, as Mr. Strang forecasted, that it is at least fifty degrees below zero. I never knew such cold. I, with 150 pounds of flesh and bone, a perfect circulation and warm clothing, suffered

even when exerting myself to get through the deep snow. Yet I saw a *Perisoreus canadensis*, with its few ounces of living tissue, and its slim, unprotected feet and legs, busily engaged in getting something to eat with no more apparent regard for the weather than it has in Summer.

"I also saw a *Putorius noveboracensis*. Now this is a very small animal, and its fur is not long. Yet it darts about through and under the snow without considering the cold. They are fierce, daring little beasts, without fear of man. I have heard it said though I know of no records, of their having attacked men, and even horses and cattle. Can you think of anything more interesting than that, my boy, an animal weighing three-quarters of a pound having the audacity to fight another weighing three-quarters of a ton?"

"He means a weasel," smiled Allison. "You have seen the fur—ermine."

"And I encountered another of your *Leporidae americanus*, my dear," continued the professor. "It is remarkable, the confidence this animal has in its protective coloration. When it sits on the snow it imagines you can not see it at all and will not move. I came within three feet of this one before it finally took to flight."

"Father!" cried Allison reprovingly. "Why didn't you kill it with a club. We need every rabbit we can get our hands on. It is all we have to eat."

"I am sorry," was the humble answer, "but I did not think. I watched him for some time, studying him, and then I had the idea of testing his confidence in his protective coloring. It was really astonishing. And how they can run over the surface of even the softest snow! It is easy to understand why they are commonly called snowshoe rabbits. Their feet spread out nearly as large as my hand. I must take some measurements of them."

When darkness came they first began to look for Strang. Allison delayed the supper hour, but at last the three ate alone. Strangely enough, Professor Manning was the first to voice fear for the safety of the fur trader, while Verner seconded him. Allison alone bravely insisted that he was able to take care of himself and stated the belief that he had gone farther than he had intended and would be back in the morning.

But, when noon came and he had not returned, her fear became greater than that

of the others. She spoke repeatedly of Strang. Several times she went out to the lake to see if he were coming. Verner tried to interest her with accounts of Chicago happenings during her absence, but he soon saw that she was not listening.

"If he doesn't get in tonight, it means he never will," she interrupted once with trembling lips.

Verner looked at her sharply. There was something more than concern for her own safety in the unsteady voice. He glanced at Professor Manning, who, as always, was busy with his notes. Then he leaned toward her and whispered—

"The chances are he saw a way to get out and took it."

"Keith!" exclaimed Allison, shocked by the malignancy of his expression. "Mr. Strang would not do such a thing. He has had an accident. He has sacrificed himself for us."

"For you, you mean. If it weren't for you he wouldn't stick with us a minute."

"Don't talk like that to me, Keith!" she replied indignantly. "Mr. Strang made this long trip to find us, he has planned the only possible way for our escape, and he is doing it to help all of us."

"I know what I am talking about," insisted Verner. "From what he said when we started I gathered that you were the principal object of his search, and, as for me, he wouldn't care what happened to me. He went off and left me when the dogs went through the ice."

"Don't be absurd," said Allison with more anger. "We face too great a problem to waste our energies in even discussing such things. Mr. Strang is too much of a man for us to talk of him when he is absent, especially when we think of all he is doing for us, of how much we must depend upon him."

Allison's anger, and her warm defense of Strang, only served to increase Verner's jealous temper. His face whitened, and he leaned closer as he whispered:

"Don't paint too rosy a picture of this fellow. Did you ever think it strange that a man who uses good English, who shows that he has known better things, should isolate himself up here in this desolate, impossible place? Do you remember that he himself said that he had been here only five years?"

"Keith! Mr. Strang lives here because

of his health. He told me so last Summer."

"His health' is good. He told me something different. He lives here because they won't find him in such a place, because he can't go back or they will get him. 'His health!' He can't go back to the States."

Allison only looked at her fiancé with frank unbelief. Her silent defense of the trader urged Verner on.

"You don't believe it? Listen. He got confidential one night in camp. He knew you and I were engaged, and we spoke of it. He was silent for a moment, and then he said: 'I can't ask any girl to marry me, ever.'"

Allison twisted and braided the long strips of rabbit-skin for a moment. Then she looked up and said firmly:

"Don't ever speak of such a thing to me again, Keith. Whether what you say is true or not, the fact remains that Mr. Strang succeeded in reaching us, even after his equipment was lost, and that he has shown his willingness to do all that he can to get us out safely. That alone should render him immune from any thoughts we may have relative to his past or his character. In any event, we don't know but that it may have been a youthful slip, even something for which he was not to blame. We can't judge unless we know the facts."

"I know enough," retorted Verner. "With what he told me, with little remarks he let slip about Chicago, and some things I remember a lawyer telling me when speaking of a queer case, I have Mr. Strang's number."

Something in Allison's eyes, something suggestive of contempt, brought reason to his jealousy-inflamed mind. His hatred and resentment had driven him farther than he had intended to go. The girl's warm defense of Strang had made him reckless. But he was only hurting himself, not the fur trader.

"I guess I've talked too much," he said after a moment. "This waiting and freezing and starving gets on my nerves. I'm sorry."

"I know it's hard, Keith," she answered gently, "and I know how hard it must be for you. We'll forget about it."

The next morning Allison awakened to find the wigwam dark, the fire entirely gone out.

"Mr. Strang!" she called, sitting up suddenly in her blankets.

"Has Strang come?" demanded Verner eagerly from the other side of the wigwam.

"I thought I heard him, heard some one outside," she answered. "Build up the fire, Keith. The cold is terrible."

Awkwardly, because he was unaccustomed to the task, and because the cold caused violent fits of shivering, Verner got a fire going and then crawled back into his blankets beside Professor Manning.

"Two days and two nights now," he said after a moment. "It looks as though we wouldn't see him again."

"Keith! What if that is true? What will we do?"

"I know it," he answered soberly. "Strang carried the whole load. We didn't know what he meant until he was gone. I wouldn't blame him if he skipped out."

"Keith!"

"I don't think he did. I merely said I wouldn't blame him if he did. I can see now what a job he had on his hands."

"And if he is gone, lost, hurt——"

Allison did not finish the sentence.

"It means we are, too. There isn't one chance in a million of our ever getting out of this."

"But some one will surely come in search of us, some time."

"Perhaps, but that doesn't interest us. We would starve long before they reached this place. Besides, no one knows where to look."

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Professor Manning.

"I thought you were asleep, father!" cried Allison. And then she added. "But perhaps it is better that you know what we really face."

The professor crawled out of his blankets and sat beside the fire.

"At least," he said after a moment, "I can get my notes in shape and prepare all my specimens and place everything in a safe spot. Then, if any one should find this place, the results of the expedition will be preserved."

"Of course, father," replied Allison with a smile across the blaze, while Verner cursed beneath the blankets under which he had huddled to escape the cold.

Professor Manning alone ate breakfast cheerfully. Verner, who had now subsisted solely on rabbit for five days, hardly touched his portion. After the meal the professor started to rise, only to drop back to his

seat. Allison glanced at him quickly, but her father was smiling.

"A very good breakfast, my dear," he said. "I think I will sit here by the fire to-day. It seems colder outside."

When daylight came Verner began his daily task of gathering wood. Allison announced that she would look after her snares and, with Keith's snow-shoes, started down the trail to the lake.

She did not walk with her usual swing and there was no eagerness to know what her traps held. It was not despondency. She had fought alone for weeks before the coming of the men. But there was a fear, a fear that had become a haunting certainty, that Strang was dead. And, somehow, the fear wiped out not only the courage to fight on but the desire.

The fact that there were eight rabbits in her snares did not bring elation nor ease the weight of her heavy load as she started out of the swamp. As she emerged upon the ice she saw a man far out on the lake. Immediately, instinctively, she shouted as loudly as she could. The stranger was too far away to permit recognition, but it was some one, some one who could bring help, and she shouted again and again.

When her first cry reached him the man stopped. Then, with a swing of his left foot, he turned and started on a lope straight toward her, the snow flying in a cloud before him as his webs threw it into the air.

It was through this cloud of fine, dry snow that Allison recognized Strang.

"Oh," she cried, "you're back!"

And then she suddenly began to cry.

"Back! Of course! Why, you didn't—you folks didn't think I had run away and left you?"

"No, no," she protested through her tears. "We thought something dreadful had happened to you and that you had perished. We had given you up."

"I never considered that," replied Strang soberly. "You see, I didn't think about your not understanding that I might have to stay out a night or two. That's part of the hunting-game in a case like this."

"But it mustn't be again," she declared. "I—we—we worry too much, and we are so helpless without you."

"But if I can't get back, like this time?"

"You mustn't go so far. Promise me that you won't stay out overnight again."

"But——"

"No. You must promise. The risk is too great."

Something in her eager pleading, something in the eyes that held his own, brought a flash of incomprehensible hope, of joy he had not dared dream of.

"Very well," he answered quietly. "I'll promise to get in every night after this. Let me carry your rabbits. Eight, eh? That's far better than I did. I didn't even see a track."

"Not a track! Then we may not get any caribou?"

"Oh, that must not discourage us. I circled west and then north. Next I'll take the east. I've got to run into them some time."

At the wigwam there was another enthusiastic reception for Strang, this time from Verner.

"You gave us a scare, old man," he called as he stopped before the door with a load of wood. "What luck?"

"None," replied Strang. "Miss Manning is the meat getter," and he dropped her rabbits outside the door.

Professor Manning did not rise to greet the returned wanderer.

"I'm staying in bed to keep warm," he said with a smile as the three sat down beside the fire. "As a matter of scientific interest, I would like to know how you keep warm when you are out without shelter in this temperature. I can't do it here beside a fire and with good clothes and heavy blankets."

"I don't always," laughed the trader, "though I'm generally too tired to care. I find a sheltered place in a swamp with lots of dry windfalls handy, build a bough bed, start a big fire and lie down. When the fire dies out I get cold, wake up and build it again."

"I think," replied the professor musingly, "that man is perhaps the most astonishing of all animals."

Then he looked up quickly.

"Did you, by any chance, Mr. Strang, ever live in the tropics?"

"Yes," the trader answered. "I spent two years in Central America."

Verner looked up quickly to find Allison's startled glance thrown his way. But the professor, suddenly animated, went on—

"And there you were able to endure the

heat, the great humidity, as well as you now endure the cold?"

"About the same, I think, though I prefer this country as a whole."

"Remarkable," went on the professor as if to himself. "I look for strange things among birds and little animals, and man offers so much more."

When Allison set the pot of boiled rabbits off the fire a little later Professor Manning did not rise with the others to begin the meal.

"You are not getting tired of rabbit, are you, Professor?" laughed Strang.

"No," was the rather faint response. "Except for a slight distinctive taste, *Leporidae americanus* affords an excellent meat."

He began to turn over, only to groan so audibly that everyone started.

"Father!" demanded Allison anxiously. "You haven't, haven't——"

"I am afraid that I have, my dear. But don't mind me. Go on with your dinner. I am sure Mr. Strang must be hungry."

"What is it?" asked Verner.

"It's rheumatism," said Allison with a hint of tragedy in her voice. "He has had it before, severe attacks."

"Rheumatism," repeated Strang seriously. "It means he can't walk, can't even rise?"

Allison nodded as she arose and went to her father's side.

"And that means," exploded Verner angrily, "that even if we get caribou, make our own outfit, we can't go out anyhow."

Allison looked at the two men, Strang sympathetic, serious, Verner angry, despairing. Each knew the other's thoughts. Each knew the fresh problem they faced. And from three hearts hope disappeared.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW HERO

EVEN Allison's optimism was gone when the three finally sat down to eat. At Strang's suggestion, she had boiled some rice for her father, and she could barely restrain the tears when she saw the enjoyment it brought him.

Strang and Verner did not speak during the meal. The trader's silence was that of a man who plans anew when backed into the last ditch. The other was unable to hide his despair and the futile anger it caused.

In the middle of the afternoon Professor Manning, though he said nothing, was evidently in great pain. Strang had made a raised bed for him nearer the fire so that the invalid would receive the heat of the flames both below and on the side.

At last Allison, suffering because she knew how her father suffered, went to the side of the wigwam occupied by the professor's things and brought out a small leather medicine case. Silently she fitted together a small hypodermic syringe, took a tablet from a tiny tube and dissolved it in a spoonful of water.

Strang had been watching her fascinated. At last he leaned forward and whispered—

"What are you going to do?"

"Morphine. It is the only thing for him."

"Don't!" exclaimed the trader so vehemently that Allison, startled, looked up. At the same time he reached out his hand toward the needle.

"But why let him suffer," she asked. "He is suffering far more than we realize, for he'll never say anything."

"Suffer! That! He's not suffering now!"

"What do you mean?"

Strang suddenly relaxed from his tense attitude and then drew back.

"Nothing," he answered quietly. "Perhaps it is best. I—I'm not used to that sort of thing, is all."

After a short time Professor Manning dropped off to sleep. As soon as the first heavy breathing came, the three, who had been watching him silently, turned at once to each other.

"Well," said Strang with the first show of cheerfulness on the part of any of them, "our problem is complicated somewhat. But that is no reason why we should lose our nerve."

"Complicated!" exclaimed Verner. "It's changed, a new problem now!"

Strang looked at him angrily, but his tone was even when he spoke.

"It's not a new problem. Don't make any mistakes. We just have one more thing to consider."

"You still want us to stick here and die by inches!" flared Verner, heedless of the glance Strang had given him.

"What would you suggest?" asked the trader.

"You've got to go out and get help. It's the only possible thing to do. We can't keep this up. We can't live on rabbit eter-

nally. We can't huddle around this fire until the Winter's ended."

"How long do these attacks generally last, Miss Manning?" asked Strang.

"A week, sometimes two weeks. Once he was ill a month."

"Then, with good care, he may be ready to travel by the time we are able to go out?"

"Possibly with good care, but, don't you see, he can't have any sort of care here. We can't even keep him warm as he should be, and his diet—why, that is impossible."

Allison had clearly lost her courage, and Strang hastened to reassure her.

"Let's not look at the worst of it," he said. "Perhaps this is to be only a slight attack, and he will be well soon."

"There's nothing to do but for you to go out, Strang," interrupted Verner.

"And leave Miss Manning here alone with her father?" asked the trader with no attempt to disguise his meaning. Then he turned his back on the man and spoke to the girl.

"I'm going to get out early tomorrow and make another try. I've got to get caribou soon. It's impossible not to. Do everything you can to make your father comfortable. There is no need in deciding anything until we see how his case develops. In the meantime, no matter what the plans, we have got to have food, and it's my job to get it. The beans and the rice and the tea must be saved for him. We're barely holding even on the rabbits, so we've got to have meat."

"You'll be back at night?" asked Allison anxiously.

Strang hesitated.

"I sometimes get too far away."

"No! No! You must come back! Please don't stay away another night."

"All right," he answered gently. "If I've still got two legs, I'll come."

Strang returned the next night, staggering under the load of a small caribou. But he failed to join in the joy his burden brought to the wigwam.

"It's only a last Spring's calf, probably cut off from the herd by wolves or something. It was just luck I ran into it in a swamp. There wasn't a sign of another."

"But it's meat, a change of food!" cried Allison excitedly.

"It won't last us a week, and the hide isn't worth anything. How are you, Professor?"

"Feeling better, my boy, much better."

Strang glanced at Allison, who shook her head and, with a motion toward her forearm and two raised fingers, indicated that she had administered morphine twice that day.

Nevertheless, Professor Manning insisted on rising and sharing in the jubilation of their first caribou meal the next noon, and Strang returned, luckless, at night to find him sitting beside the fire. The scientist's face was drawn, the lines of pain twisting his smile grotesquely. He showed, too, an interest in the plans for the first time, especially when Strang announced that, at last, he believed he was on the trail of a herd.

He had found the tracks late in the afternoon, tracks probably two days old, and had not had time to follow them.

"But you'll get them tomorrow," declared Allison. "You'll get all we need."

"I didn't mean to raise such hopes," said Strang. "They may have traveled too far away, and they may not have gone two miles from where I saw the sign."

"Then what will you do?"

"I'll go back in the morning to where I left the tracks. They were headed for a big swamp, and the chances are that they will stay in it. Verner can take the trail I made off to the south yesterday and go as far as a little lake he'll find southeast of here. He can see whether they have crossed that to the west and, if they have, tell me tomorrow night, for I won't have time to follow them through that far."

Strang was away long before a suggestion of dawn, and Verner started three hours later. Allison, busy with her rabbit-skins, remained in the wigwam all day with her father. The professor was more cheerful than ever and talked of many things besides his work.

In mid-afternoon he fell asleep and Allison slipped out for the first time. She needed more rabbit-skins, but she did not like to leave her father alone. The fire would die out and he would become chilled.

She walked down the hard, frozen trail to the lake. Far down an arm to the south she saw a figure on the ice, some one coming toward her. Verner, she surmised. He would be at the wigwam in fifteen minutes, in plenty of time to build up the fire. She ran back, put more wood on the blaze and started toward the door.

"Where are you going?" asked the professor.

"How you startled me, father," she said as she turned quickly. "I thought you were asleep. I am going to look at my snares. Keith is coming across the lake and will be here in fifteen or twenty minutes. He'll keep the fire going."

"Good luck, my dear," he said as she slipped through the low door.

Out on the edge of the lake Allison saw that the distant speck on the ice was nearer and hurried on to her snares. As she entered the swamp she turned to look again. It was Verner, she was certain.

An hour was required to reset and straighten all her snares and to remove the seven rabbits which had fallen victims to her traps, and the sun had set when she returned to the lake.

Out in the center of the white expanse was Strang, stooped beneath a load. After a few minutes he was near enough for her to call, and he crossed to her trail.

"Got three!" he panted happily as he dropped a quarter of meat from his shoulder into the snow. "And tomorrow I'm going to get all we need. I know where they are."

"And then we'll begin to make snow-shoes and robes and the toboggan!" she cried, impulsively grasping one of his hands in both of hers. "How are we ever going to repay you, Mr. Strang, for what you are doing for us?"

"You've already done so," he replied simply.

He picked up his meat and together they returned to camp.

"Father is much better," said Allison. "I am sure he is going to get well, and then we'll all go out together. Won't it be fun, the preparations, and then the start?"

It was dark when they reached the wigwam. Strang held open the flap for Allison to enter.

"Three caribou!" she cried. "And tomorrow the rest! Where is father?"

The trader straightened from the low door to see the professor's empty bed. Verner, a sheet of paper in an extended hand, stood beside the fire.

"Where is he?" repeated Allison.

Verner only held the paper nearer. The girl grasped it and went down to her knees beside the blaze.

"He's gone!" she screamed in terror.

"Gone out to die! Oh!" and she fell over onto her bed, her face in her arms.

Strang reached down, grasped the paper that had slipped to the ground, and held it beside the fire. He read:

DEAR DAUGHTER:

I'm worse than you or the others think and I know I'll never get well here in the wigwam. In the meantime, I am destroying your chances of escape, holding you here to share the same fate. So I'll simply remove myself. With Strang's help, you can get out easily. Be sure to take the notes and specimens.

With love,

FATHER.

CHAPTER VII

VERNER PLAYS HIS ACE

"WHERE did you get this?" demanded Strang of Verner.

"On his bed, beside the fire. I just found it."

"When?"

"Just a minute ago."

"You just got back, then?"

"Of course."

Strang turned and pushed aside the flap. In two minutes he was back with a handful of birch-bark thrust into a split stick. He ignited this in the fire and ran out again.

There were many tracks in the snow about the wigwam, tracks where the professor had gone out to watch birds and animals, where Verner had cut wood, the trails to the south and to the lake on the east made by Strang on his hunting trips. Those beaten down by snow-shoes presented a hard, frozen path, one on which moccasined feet would leave no impression visible in the light of his torch.

But Strang had already decided which to follow. Professor Manning had deliberately left the wigwam with the intention of perishing before he could be found. In the intense cold it would not be long. He would, however, take the least-used trail that afforded the best going, a trail leading away from the direction in which he, Allison and Verner had gone. That meant toward the south or west, and there was a choice of three trails.

Strang, running quickly from one to the other, examined them closely. On the pavement-like surface there was nothing to be seen. At the second he ran on a short distance and held his torch close to the path. As he was about to turn back he

stopped and went down to his knees. The light showed freshly crumpled snow on the side.

Of course. The professor, weak, pain-tortured, could not keep on the trail. His foot had slipped off.

Instantly Strang was on his feet and running forward. He went thirty yards and stopped. Another sign, and he continued a little way farther, now at a walk and watching both sides closely.

Two hundred yards from the wigwam he found what he had been looking for, the place where Professor Manning had left the path. His torch was barely flickering now, but he plunged on, depending upon feeling his way in the steps the other had taken.

The search was soon over. A black object showed just ahead in the snow, and the next moment he was lifting the limp body of the scientist to his shoulders and plunging back to the trail.

Staggering and slipping with his burden, Strang hurried toward the wigwam. He knew that minutes were precious, that perhaps he might have been too late. Halfway he heard Allison calling his name.

"Roger! Roger!"

"I've got him!" he shouted in return. "Go back and start the fire."

Allison was waiting at the door and helped to get his inert burden on to the couch. She did not speak, did not ask questions, did not show a trace of a tear. But her fingers crept in under the shirt and rested there for a long moment.

"It's beating," she whispered, looking up at Strang with a smile.

"Then we must get busy," replied the trader as he dropped to his knees beside her. "I'll get off his moccasins and socks and you see to his hands. Put them into that kettle of drinking-water first. Then rub them. His face is frosted in places, but that won't do any harm."

He had already stripped one white foot and was busy with the other. He bathed both in cold water, rubbed them and then bathed them again. Allison was equally busy and was the first to get results.

"They're getting red!"

"That's good," panted Strang. "It means you've saved them. But wait until he feels it!"

"Feels it? How?"

"It isn't freezing that hurts a man.

That's an easy way to die. It's recovering from frost-bite, when the blood begins to run again. There are few things that hurt any worse."

"And he's suffered so much from the other," whispered Allison compassionately.

"That's when he'll need the morphine."

At last they knew that they had saved his hands and feet and rested for a moment. Water was boiling, and Strang made strong tea, which, with Allison's help, he poured, scalding, between the unconscious man's lips.

After an hour Professor Manning's eyes opened for a moment, only to close as a spasm of pain distorted his face. Strang and Allison wrapped him closely in his blankets and as he felt them he whispered apologetically—

"I only made things worse, it seems."

"Hush, father!" commanded his daughter. "Don't speak now."

Strang prepared supper while Allison sat beside her father. After he had fully recovered consciousness, and the warm blood had begun to force its way into the frosted hands and feet, the pain became great. At last the girl opened the medicine-case. Strang nodded as she glanced inquiringly at him.

"He'll need it now if he ever does," he whispered.

But it was necessary to give him a second dose an hour later, and it was late when the three sat down to their meal. For a few minutes no one spoke. Then Allison, tears filling her eyes, looked up at Strang.

"He was the bravest of us all," she whispered.

"And we thought he didn't even realize what we were up against," added the trader in the awed tone of a man who bows to another's courage.

Verner was silent, as he had been since Professor Manning was carried into the wigwam. He offered nothing in praise of the older man's unselfishness, did not appear to hear what Strang and Allison were saying.

Nor did Allison appear to know that he was there. After the meal she and Strang discussed plans. All her remarks were addressed to the trader.

"When will you bring in the meat you have killed?" she asked.

"Not until I get four or five more. I think I can do that tomorrow. We have enough

meat for a few days, and it is more important to get what we need before the herd travels too far away."

"And then we'll begin making snow-shoes and robes?" she asked anxiously.

"As soon as the meat and hides are packed in."

"But," and she glanced toward her father.

Strang had felt the subtle change in the wigwam, had felt rather than seen Verner's silence and the girl's disregard for her fiancé. He remembered suddenly that all her remarks had been addressed to him, that her tone, her manner of asking questions, had shown that she looked to him only.

With these thoughts crowding in all at once, with the realization that this girl had turned from the man to whom she had given her word, that, in this time of peril, she depended upon him, Strang felt a quick, intoxicating elation. His service, the only means by which he might show his devotion, was bearing fruit. Not only was he serving, but she was acknowledging his service.

"We'll get him out if we have to haul him out ourselves," he declared confidently. "We'll make a toboggan big enough for him and our outfit, too."



BUT Strang did not go hunting in the morning. Snow was falling. A thick, soft, windless, silent storm was on, and he drew back into the wigwam. He wanted to get out, wanted to settle the caribou question as quickly as possible. But, to attempt to find the herd in that storm was futile. He could not even find his way in the feathery smother. And, to make the delay more exasperating, there was the knowledge that such storms generally lasted two, three or even four days.

Professor Manning turned and groaned in his sleep. Strang thought of the difficulty of getting the older man out, of the torture he must endure, of the weariness of the others from the ceaseless tugging at the toboggan traces. And the thought gave him an idea. He could make the toboggan while waiting for the storm to end.

When it was light enough he went out with the ax. Allison, with rice and the broth of the caribou, made soup for her father. The professor's pain was still

great, and, after he had eaten and had some tea, she administered more morphine. When the scientist was asleep she turned suddenly to the young man across the fire.

"You got here just before we did last night?" she asked casually.

"Only a minute."

"Keith," she demanded coldly, calmly, "why do you add lying to the rest of it?"

He looked up quickly, indignantly, his mouth opening to speak. But, before the calm, confident expression in the girl's eyes, he remained silent.

"I saw you coming," she continued, still quietly. "I didn't start until I knew you would be here fifteen minutes after I left. When I went into the swamp down the lake you were almost here. I left a large pile of wood near the fire, and it was all gone when I came back."

She had not taken her eyes from his while she spoke. As she stopped she looked down at the fire for a moment and then turned her head as if listening to the sound of Strang's ax back of the wigwam.

"You got here just after father left," she continued, the calmness slipping as she began. "You came in and found the note. You knew what he had done, why he had done it. It was still daylight so that you could see his tracks. But you let him go. You stayed here by the fire and kept it going while he was lying out there in a drift freezing to death. You sat here and smoked your pipe, with the tobacco he has shared with you, while he, with more man in those poor, frozen toes than there is in your whole body, was sacrificing himself for us. Oh!"

Her voice had risen, the contempt had crept in, until she ended with a little cry of abhorrence and turned away.

"I did," admitted Verner instantly and angrily. "I knew he had just gone, and I let him go. Why shouldn't I? It was the sensible thing to do. Why should one man endanger the lives of three others? Without him to reckon with, there would be no doubt of you and I getting out.

"You and I are young. We have our lives before us, have a great deal to do in the world. There is a lot waiting for us down there, a big future, a big responsibility. Your father has lived his life. Things are in the past with him. Everything is in front of us.

"He saw all that. He was a sensible man.

He acted with the knowledge that he was doing the right thing, that he was doing the one thing that would save our lives. Besides, it was his own affair. I had no right to butt in."

Allison could only stare incredulously at him. There was horror in her eyes, a loathing, that maddened Verner to a fresh defense. But, before he could speak, she suddenly burst forth:

"Future! Responsibility! Mine! And always with the knowledge of how you had let him die. You——"

She halted the words that were on her lips and then, by a great effort, continued more calmly:

"In any event, there is nothing between us now. Perhaps your selfishness, your refusal to enter into the spirit necessary for our escape from this, your childish resentment against Mr. Strang, your failure even to try to do your share, would have killed in time any feeling I may have had for you. But this has wiped out everything. I don't love you. I don't think now that I ever did. I don't even hate you. I simply have contempt for you."

"Why don't you tell the truth?" flared Verner. "Why don't you admit the real reason? It isn't this," and he waved his hand toward the sleeping professor, "and it isn't my inability to do something I never was trained to do.

"I came up here from Chicago to find you. I tried to hire men to do the work that I am not fitted to do, that I abhor doing. I couldn't get them, but I came anyway. And now, after I have come, after I have done all this, you turn against me. It isn't because I'm clumsy with an ax, or can't stand the cold like a native, or don't know how to hunt. No. It's Strang. Up here where only the physical counts, where a good pair of legs and arms are worth more than a brain, where a knowledge of snowshoes and storms and rabbit-snares is considered the only essential qualification, you lose your head over the man who has them and forget all about the things I have in the city, in the place where you must spend your life, where the real things in this world are done.

"No, it's Strang, Strang with his big muscles and stubborn head, that has turned you against me. But," and his tone became low and vicious, "you won't get him. I didn't come all this way, endure all this, to

lose you. I came up here to get you, and I'm not going to let another man walk off with you.

"Strang will get us out of this, and that will end it. He can take us to a place where we can get out, but he can't go any farther. He's got to stay here, stay here to rot in this beastly place. Then you'll come to your senses, and, if you don't——"

He stopped with a little smile and began to fill his pipe. Allison looked at him spell-bound. Then the full meaning of what he had left unsaid came to her and made her forget the insult in every word he had uttered.

"You coward!" she choked. "After he had saved your life you would——"

Her emotion was too great for her to finish, but Verner supplied the words.

"Turn him over to the people who are looking for him. Then what would you think of your hero?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLIZZARD

AT THE end of the second day of the storm Roger Strang had finished his toboggan. Slowly, carefully, painstakingly, he had hewed from green birch three parallel strips and a dozen cross-bars. He had finished one side of his boards carefully, making a smooth surface that hardly showed the infinite little ax-marks.

Then, sitting beside the fire, he had bored dozens of small holes with the red-hot point of one of the professor's scientific instruments and through these passed some of Allison's precious snare-wire to bind the cross-bars to the boards.

When he had finished the long, slim, flat toboggan, he built up a big fire, heated the largest pot full of water and, in the steam, made the boards pliable near the front. With Verner's help he bent the toboggan into a long, rising curve at the forward end and guyed it in place with two strands of snare-wire on each side.

"There," he finally said as he looked with satisfaction upon his work. "That's out of the way. It could be better, but it will serve our purpose, and we've got it ready for hauling in the meat."

Allison at the same time finished one rabbit-skin blanket. She had cut the many skins into strips half an inch wide, starting

at the outside of each hide and working in a spiral toward the center. Then, twisting and weaving the long strings, she had formed a large, soft, light comforter. This, at Strang's suggestion, she had fastened to half of a blanket, providing a robe that would keep her warm in 'most any weather.

Professor Manning was immediately wrapped in the new covering in celebration of its completion. Allison took the two blankets he had used, leaving one and a half for Verner and Strang. Roger took the half and that night for the first time since his arrival had a covering while he slept.

In that last day of the storm Verner had remained by the fire, silent, unmindful of the others. Allison and Strang, busy with their work, discussed details of their preparations.

Not once did Allison or Verner speak to each other. The trader noticed this and also a change in the girl. Her enthusiasm had become more practical, her courage more determined, her tone more quiet. And yet, though they worked together, planned together, spent the time together, Strang felt a change in her attitude toward him. It was at once more distant and more solicitous, more friendly and less comradely.

That night, as he lay beside the fire planning, as always, this change in the girl returned again and again to his mind. He did not understand it, could not determine its cause. He only knew that there was trouble between her and Verner, but how he could enter into the result he could not determine.



STRANG wakened the next morning to find a star-filled sky and mountainless tree-tops above the wigwam. Long before daylight he was gone, leaving the others still sleeping.

Allison was the first to waken. She heated soup for her father, in whose condition there continued to be no improvement, and prepared breakfast for herself and Verner. As always, the preparation of a meal was the same. At first they had subsisted entirely on boiled rabbit. Now it was boiled caribou alternating with steaks fried in tallow.

They ate huge quantities of the meat, the hunger induced by the work and by the intense cold being greater than any aversion which monotony might bring. So far they had not touched the scanty supply of beans and rice except to make broth for Professor Manning.

At daylight Verner, driven more by the atmosphere of restraint within the wigwam, went out to gather wood. The reserve pile had been greatly diminished during the two days of the storm and he spent most of the daylight hours cutting wood and carrying it in. Allison, nursing her father, visiting her rabbit-snares and scraping the hair from the small caribou hide Strang had first brought in, was busy the entire day.

Professor Manning slept or lay in a stupor much of the time. Once, when he opened his eyes and looked about the wigwam, Allison set aside her work and went over to him.

"You're feeling better, father?" she asked gently.

"I wish that I might say so truthfully, my dear," he whispered. "But I am afraid there is no improvement."

"But there will be soon," she answered brightly.

Then she became serious and leaned forward to take one of his hands.

"Promise me one thing, father," she commanded. "Promise me that, no matter what happens, you will never do anything so foolish as the other night. We can't always be here with you, to watch you, and you must promise."

He studied her face for a moment and then said simply:

"I'll promise, little girl. I thought I was doing it for the best, but perhaps I was wrong."

"Of course you were wrong!" she exclaimed as she leaned forward and kissed him. "We all know you were wrong, and we don't want you to even think of such a thing again."

"I knew Strang would get you out, and that Keith would take care of you once you were back in civilization. I knew my being here in this condition was a menace to your safety."

"But you must live to get out with me, father!" she protested fearfully. "You must live to take care of me, to help me when we do get out. There isn't any one but you, daddy, no one but you."

He looked at her in troubled wonder a moment.

"You mean," he said slowly, "you mean that Verner——"

"Has nothing to do with my future!" she exclaimed fiercely.

"Why, little girl, I thought——"

"It was wrong, all a mistake. This has shown it to me. Father, he——"

She stopped suddenly and turned away. For a long time they were silent. Then the professor stroked the hand that lay in his and whispered—

"I didn't think you knew, and I didn't want you to know because of the unhappiness it would cause."

She turned quickly and leaned forward.

"Then you knew, too? You saw him coming?"

He nodded.

"I was just at the edge of the spruce and lay down in the trail. He went in and I expected every moment he would come out to look for me. But he didn't, and after a while I crawled away."

Neither spoke for a long time, and then it was the father who broke the silence.

"It is strange what our boasted civilization has done," he said. "It glosses over and smooths out and hides the defects, and we can spend a lifetime with a man and not know his true self. But up here, where life is as raw as the wind, where man drops back to the bare essentials, he stands out naked for all his friends to see. It is relentless, this laying bare of a soul in nature's laboratory, as ruthless as science itself. I wonder, I wonder, if it is fair."

Night came but it did not bring Strang. Three hours after darkness Allison was still waiting supper for him. She did not doubt for a moment but that he would come. He had promised, and she believed him.

Bedtime came and he did not return. Verner at last lay down to sleep, but Allison remained sitting beside the fire. For a long time she kept the blaze going, kept the pot of meat hot beside it, listened always for the crunch of snow-shoes on the trail.

At midnight she, too, lay down and at last fell asleep, her heart filled with a more gripping fear than she had ever known.

Daylight came slowly the next forenoon. Low, dark clouds drifted overhead, a soft wind, depressing in the threat it carried, moaned in the spruces. Twice Allison went out to the lake to see if Strang were in sight. When she returned the second time to find Verner stretched out comfortably beside the fire, her fear and her helplessness changed to anger.

"Why do you sit there like that?" she demanded fiercely. "He's out there somewhere expecting you to come for him."

Verner looked up in surprise.

"He got back all right when he was out two nights before," he finally answered.

"But he promised that he would not do it again. He said he'd come back if he had two legs to travel on."

"So Strang has reached the stage where he makes promises to you alone, has he?"

Anger choked her and she wheeled away from him. Verner watched her for a moment and then arose and left the wigwam. Soon she heard him chopping wood back in the forest.

For a few seconds she listened, looking down at her blankets. Then quickly, impulsively, she began to roll them up. Outside the wigwam she fastened these to the toboggan and returned to get a kettle and her own little "toy hatchet," as Strang had once called it. Again outside she took a large piece of frozen meat and tied it to the toboggan with the kettle and the ax.

For a moment she hesitated, looking at the pitifully small outfit she had gathered. With quick, determined steps, she reentered the wigwam, from which she emerged with the medicine-case and a small sack of tea. These were tucked inside the blankets and then, with Verner's snow-shoes on her feet, she slipped the loop of the toboggan traces over her shoulders and started toward the lake.

The trail was good, the toboggan slipped more easily with its light load than she had expected, and she walked rapidly out onto the ice. There she discovered that the path was frozen so solidly she could travel more easily without the snow-shoes and stopped to strap them on top of the blankets. As she again slipped into the traces she heard a call behind her. As she listened Verner's voice, anxious, commanding, came to her.

"Allison! Allison! Where are you?"

She turned at once and went on toward the east, the toboggan creaking on the frozen snow behind her.

It was nearly noon when Allison started and for two hours she traveled rapidly. The trail was smooth, hard, clearly marked by its deep trench in the snow. There were no branches, only the one interminable groove twisting on and on across little lakes, along small streams, through thick spruce swamps, over little ridges, across desolate burns.

For a time the girl was borne on by the elation of her purpose. Something besides

mere reason had told her that Strang was hurt, that he needed help. And, with Verner failing him, with Verner lying comfortably beside the fire, the responsibility of his rescue had fallen to her shoulders.

That she might not be capable of the task, that she was placing herself in danger, that she was leaving her father in the care of a man who had already shown his selfish disregard for others, did not occur to her for some time. There was only the one thought: She was going out to help Roger Strang.

Just what prompted this obsessing purpose she did not stop to analyze. Womanlike, she did not reason, and, womanlike, she needed no motive. For seemingly endless weeks she had battled with the primitive, had lived as women lived hundreds and hundreds of years before. The endless fight for existence, for survival, had stripped in a short time what centuries had built, and there remained only the one fact, he needed her help.

Even contempt for Verner was absent. Something else, something bigger, occupied her entire consciousness, and something stronger than she had ever known drove her on.

This was in the first hours of the journey. The desolate wastes, the growing wind from the north, the low, menacing clouds, the crushing silence, none of these reached her. She seemed to be soaring through space, borne on resistlessly, in a world by herself, alone with one thought.

But in time the traces of the toboggan began to pull more insistently. The failure of the physical to keep pace with her spiritual elation began to make itself felt in faltering legs and little stabs of pain between the shoulders. The empty world through which she was passing began to impel itself upon her. The quiet threat of the cold and the snow and the loneliness suddenly became a din that shattered her courage.

Snow began to drive with the increasing wind. The cold became greater. The light of the short day was fading. But Allison only walked faster, tugged more resolutely at the traces. For, with the realization of her position, came the knowledge, like a blow, of the true reason for her action. It was Strang, Strang himself, and nothing except Strang, that had driven her out of the warm wigwam, forced her swiftly along the miles and miles of trail. It was Strang that

she desired to save as her man, not as her rescuer.

Again the work of centuries was effaced in an instant. The primitive fight, the primitive life of the weeks that had just passed, had brought the primitive impulses, the primitive desires. It was her mate, not her friend, not her deliverer from a freezing, starving death, that she sought out there in the barren places.

And, primitively, she admitted it freely to herself. As freely she would have admitted it to her father or to Verner. Life, safety, comfort in the world she had known, nothing counted unless he were there to share it with her.

Verner's story, Strang's own reticence in her presence, the facts of his being there in the northland with only the common excuse of ill-health, his admission that he had also been in Central America, another haven of self-exiles, none of these things came to her as she pushed on in the trench his webs had made. Out there in the immensity of the wilderness, on the heights from which she looked back upon her life of only a few months before as something strange, distant, unreal, nothing counted but Roger Strang—Roger Strang and herself.

But great as was this spiritual, original force that drove her on, the wilderness in time undermined it. The snow fell more thickly. The wind struck through to chill the flesh beneath perspiration-dampened garments. The clouds seemed to hang lower and to shut out more and more the fading light. A menacing note began to dominate the sound of the wind in the trees. The toboggan seemed suddenly to have taken on increased weight.

And then the trail forked. Allison stopped, terror-stricken. For hours she had been accustomed to the one undeviating course, the deep path that had become familiar. But here one trail led on toward the northeast, while the other turned off at right angles toward the southeast.

The girl looked around in the twilight. She was in a small barren on the edge of a swamp. The white expanse was unbroken. And then her eye caught something black off to the right, in the direction in which one trail led. The trail had been traversed only once, was not completely broken. She required the snow-shoes.

Quickly she put them on and started

toward the object she had seen. One hundred yards and she was there.

It was the dressed carcass of a caribou. The snow was trampled and red beneath the light covering of that day's fall. And the trail led on a little way to another caribou, dressed and frozen.

Allison, taken out of her terror by this evidence of Strang's activities, began to think more quickly. He had killed three caribou before the storm. These could not be of that number. There was barely a layer of snowflakes on the bodies. He had killed these the day before, and this was the trail he had last made.

Instantly she was on her way, straight toward the swamp which lay black and gloomy, apparently impenetrable, before her. Strang was somewhere ahead.

With not a little fear she entered the thicket to twist and turn in the course Strang had taken. But, even before she had become accustomed to keeping his trail in the gloom, she was out again, in a big barren beyond.

For a moment she hesitated as she stared before her in the gathering darkness. There seemed to be no end to the white plain into the center of which his snowshoe tracks pointed. The wind was now blowing much harder, the snow driving more thickly. That wind, and the new snow, she knew, would soon cover all traces of where he had gone.

But the thought brought only fear for him, not for herself. That she might not be able to retrace her own steps, that she might wander aimlessly to a lingering, torturing death, did not deter her. The storm was covering his tracks, making it impossible for her to find him, and she hurried on.

Out on the big barren darkness came and with it the greater fury of the storm. The hard snow crystals grated over the surface of the drifts and lodged in the impressions which were her only guide. These began to fill and at last it was with difficulty that she felt them with each forward thrust of her webs.

The wind was straight at her back or she could not have made progress. It found no crevices in her clothing or, tired and hungry as she was, it would have bitten through and numbed her body. The toboggan began to drag more harshly on the frozen particles, but the force of the wind helped

her to overcome this load and that of her weariness, and she kept on.

How long Allison drifted thus she did not know. It seemed that forever she had been the unchanging, immovable center of a circle of gray hemmed in by the blackness of the storm. The noise of the wind in her ears, the pressure of it on her back, seemed always to have been there. The heavy webs that bore her up seemed something apart from her, something over which she had no control, something that constantly and unendingly shot forward and backward beneath her stationary body.

And then they came together, the knowledge that she had lost the trail and that she was near the end of her endurance. For an instant the semi-delirium caused by exhaustion and the monotony had cleared. The automatic impulses which had controlled her legs suddenly ceased, and she went forward with great effort. There was no smoothing of the way by other webs. She was breaking her own trail.

Alone, lost in the storm, wandering aimlessly, Allison was too near exhaustion to realize her predicament. Only because she still lived, she kept on.

CHAPTER IX

THE SHELTER OF THE SPRUCE

AND then the gray circle in the center of which she had been treading for so long suddenly flattened before her. A black wall appeared out of the storm. The gray circle disappeared. The wind stopped thrusting at her back as if it had suddenly been withheld by a mighty hand. There was no sting of sharp snow pellets or scorching breath upon her cheeks. Allison had crossed the barren, reached the shelter of the spruce.

For a moment she rested, reveling in the warmth and the quiet. She was safe and comfortable temporarily, and she did not look farther. But after a little while the chill began to creep in, the weary legs to stiffen, and she was driven to motion. For a few yards she went on deeper into the spruce, only to stop when she realized how aimless and futile such a course was.

Out on the barren, in the grip of the blizzard, in the semi-delirium, panic would have come easily. Now, with the protecting forest about her, with the clear knowl-

edge of what she faced and of why she had come, Allison did not lose her head. She stopped to reason out the situation, to decide what she should do.

First, she had lost Strang's trail out on the barren. When following it the wind had been directly at her back. When it had vanished she had kept the wind in the same place. Unless he had turned sharply, he should have struck the spruce not far from where she was.

Out on the barren the trail had been obliterated, not by the new fall of snow, but by the wind filling each depression with the dustlike particles it tore from the surface as it swept across the plain. In the spruce the trail should not be covered, should still show with its deep impressions. It should be near her, but on which side?

It was a chance, but an even chance, either way, and she turned at once toward the west. By keeping near the edge of the forest, never getting far from the wind as it struck the wall of spruce, she could keep the direction.

But the work was harder than at any time that day. She had to lift her snowshoes, covered with a foot of snow, high up to the surface at each step. Continually the toboggan caught in the thick growth, and it was always difficult to turn back to disentangle it.

And then, when she thought she had gone as far as she should in that direction, her right foot went down into a hole to stop on the unmistakable frozen bottom of a snowshoe print. She bent down, felt with her hands to determine the direction, and hurried on.

But after a little while Allison realized the futility of her efforts. Strang must have passed that place not later than noon the day before. He might be miles and miles beyond, probably across another impossible burn. She was very tired, was moving forward very slowly, might go on until so near exhaustion she would be unable to make any preparations for a camp in the blizzard. Still, Strang may have been hurt while retracing his own steps, might be only a mile or two ahead of her, probably even then near death from cold and hunger.

Allison was spared the difficult solution of her problem. As she stood there debating, a flicker of light showed through the trees ahead of her. She rubbed her

eyes with her mittens. It had disappeared.

Was it fancy, hope, real? She plunged on and saw it again, longer this time, and then, sobbing, panting from her exertions, hysterical from relief and joy, she rushed into the circle of light from a small camp-fire to find Roger Strang, his rifle cocked and in his hands, sitting on a bed of boughs.

"Roger! Roger!" she cried, her face radiant.

He did not reply, only stared incredulously, while Allison, catching sight of a foot wrapped in his wool shirt stuck out beside the fire, hurried on:

"You're hurt! I knew it! I knew you would come if you could! What is it?"

"Allison!" Strang exclaimed at last. "What are you doing here, out in this storm? You didn't come because——"

He stopped, awed by the significance of his question. She nodded impatiently.

"Of course. You said you would come back if you could, and I knew you would."

"But you should never have taken such a chance!" he insisted fiercely.

She looked at him a moment in a way which silenced even thoughts of what she had done, in a way which brought the blood surging to the surface, stopped the beating of his heart.

"I had to come, Roger," she answered simply. "I had to. I couldn't stay there knowing you were out here needing help. I had to come and find you."

"But," he cried, still fighting the truth which her eyes and her voice compelled, "it wasn't worth it! You had no right!"

"It was worth everything, Roger," she answered softly, "and I had the right."

For some time neither spoke. Across the fire their eyes met, and the blizzard, their predicament, her sacrifice, his accident, everything, was forgotten.

Bravely, unashamed, the girl's eyes told of the love that had driven her out upon her search, told of her joy in finding him, of her trust and confidence now that they were together. His eyes blazed as frankly, but they were the first to falter, the first to turn away. The spell was broken.

"What happened?" she asked anxiously.

"Got my foot wet and froze it," he answered, and for the first time she saw the pain in his eyes, the drawn lines of his face. She removed her snowshoes and hurried around the fire to his side.

"Badly?" she asked as she went down to her knees beside him.

"Enough to keep me from traveling," he replied through tight teeth.

"How did it happen?"

"I got two caribou in the afternoon yesterday and kept on after the others as I wanted two more. I chased them until dark and then thought I could cut across to my trail and get back to camp. But I must have been turned around. There wasn't any sun in the afternoon, and it was cloudy last night. But I kept going until early in the morning, because—because I wanted to get back."

"Before daylight I struck a little river I thought I knew and crossed it. The water was quick and the ice bad, and I went through with one foot. When I got out I found my trail and started on, thinking I could walk fast enough to keep the foot warm. But at daylight I saw I couldn't, and I knew it was freezing. So I stopped here and built a fire. If I had cut off my moccasins and socks I might have been all right. But they were all I had and I didn't want to destroy them. So I tried to thaw them off. My foot froze while I was doing it, and I haven't been able to move since."

"And you've been sitting here all day without anything to eat and without hope of getting out alive!" she exclaimed compassionately.

"It's my fault. I should have stopped and dried out at once. But I wanted to get back to camp, and I thought I could make it."

"It's my fault!" she protested fiercely. "My fault again! If I hadn't made you give that silly promise you would have stopped. Or you wouldn't have been hurrying through the woods in the dark. Everything that has happened is my fault."

"Not in the least. You haven't been to blame for anything. I'm only sorry I haven't been able to get you out of this sooner."

She felt the barrier he had again raised between them and did not speak. Then she suddenly sprang to her feet.

"The fire's going out," she said as she pulled the toboggan closer and began to undo the lashings.

Quickly she filled the kettle with snow and hung it over the blaze. She chopped off a piece of the frozen meat and set it close to the fire to thaw, shook the snow

from the blankets and insisted that Strang wrap them about himself.

With her little ax she hacked at wind-falls and brought in more wood. When the fire was going again she cut the meat into small pieces, placed it in the kettle and returned to the wood gathering.

The storm had increased and, even in their sheltered position, began to make itself felt. The snow did not fall so quickly, but the wind began to search down through the trees and find them and the temperature began to drop.

Strang, as he sat wrapped in the blankets, looked anxiously at the bending tree tops and then at the small pile of wood Allison was able to gather. Under his breath he cursed, but he had a smile for her each time she returned with a precious load of fuel.

"You must rest," he said at last. "You have had a very hard day, and you must not get too tired. It is impossible to keep warm when you are exhausted."

She dropped wearily to the boughs beside him and sat looking at the bubbling kettle. She was tired, more tired than she knew, and the moment she ceased her activity the cold crept in, even beside the fire.

The sudden change in Strang had had its depressing effect. His eyes across the fire had told her what she wanted to know, what she had desired most. But that faint suggestion of restraint, of distance, had crept into his manner.

She looked around to where he, too, sat watching the kettle. His face was drawn with pain and his two arms were hugged around the knee above the frozen foot. Strang's comments as they had worked together over her father came to her and she remembered the pain he had suffered then.

"Does it hurt—so bad?" she asked.

"It is jumping pretty well now. It took me quite a while to get the frost out of it, and, when I did, something started."

He smiled at her cheerfully, but the smile could not hide the pain in his eyes, and she arose instantly and got the medicine-case from the toboggan.

Strang watched her as if fascinated. He saw her open the compact leather case, pull forth a hypodermic syringe and a tube of tablets. Then she suddenly replaced them.

"We must get something to eat and fix a place to sleep first," she said as she stirred the meat in the kettle. "You can lie there

in the blankets while I keep a fire going. I'll be comfortable."

"Nonsense! I'm more used to it than you are, and you are more in need of sleep."

"But you didn't sleep last night."

"No, and I don't think I will tonight."

He nodded toward his foot and smiled.

"We'll fix that part of it," she answered confidently.

They finished the kettle of meat for supper and Allison immediately placed more on the fire for the next meal.

"I'm afraid I didn't bring much," she said doubtfully.

Strang looked at the meat and again up at the tree-tops. She saw him and asked quickly:

"What is it? Do you think it won't last? Is the storm so bad?"

"There isn't much meat, and the storm promises to be as bad as I ever saw. It——"

"What?" she asked when he stopped.

"It's going to be a tough time, these next two or three days."

"There's a chance we won't get out?"

He nodded, and, when she did not speak, explained his opinion.

"We're short of food, I'm helpless, and we'll need a lot of wood. Even with a fire and these blankets, we'll have a hard time to keep from freezing. The temperature is going lower all the time, and the wind blowing harder."

He had not tried to minimize the danger, but, to his bewilderment, she did not show fear. Instead, a soft, sweet, rapturous smile spread over her face. She turned and looked at him, then held out her hands.

"Anyhow, Roger, we'll be together when it comes—the end. And each will have known."

She leaned toward him, his arms shot out, and he drew her close.

"They should be ours, they should be!" he cried as he kissed her. "Nothing can take them from us, these last hours."

Silently she clung to him, and silently he held her. There was no need to speak, no need to tell what each knew. For a long time neither moved. Then the pain in Strang's foot caused him to wince, and she sprang up instantly.

"I forgot!" she cried, picking up the medicine-case. "There is no need of your suffering so."

Again she took out the syringe.

"But there is no spoon, nothing in which to melt water and dissolve the tablet."

"Let me take it," he said eagerly as he reached out his hands.

He removed a tablet and laid it on his knees. Then he took some snow, squeezing it into an icy ball in his bare hand. Through this he thrust a small stick and held it near the fire, his bare left hand cupped beneath to catch the dripping water.

When he had enough he dissolved the tablet in it and carefully filled the syringe. With the instrument loaded, poised in the air, ready, he looked at her and smiled. He pulled up his sleeve and exposed his arm.

A spasm of pain wiped the smile from his face. He clenched his teeth and, with an effort, smiled again. Then, slowly, deliberately, he pressed the piston of the syringe and squirted the morphine and water, hissing, into the fire.

"Roger!" cried Allison.

He looked at her with a strange, fierce exultation and then, with a quick fling, threw the instrument at her feet.

"We don't need that," he said with a tone of triumph. "Now let's get ready for the night. It's going to be a bad one."

CHAPTER X

LOVE OR LIFE?

IT WAS a bad night, a night such as even Strang, with his five years' experience in the northland, had never known. The wind scattered and whirled the flames of their small fire, blowing smoke into their faces, carrying all the heat away from them. It strangled and it burned, it roared and it moaned and it shrieked, it brought its message of terror as well as its physical suffering, and, in time, a depressing effect which added to their struggle to live.

There was little sleep. Strang's foot permitted only fitful dozing. Allison's weariness served as an anesthetic, but even in her slumber she moaned and twisted and little cries of pain escaped from her lips.

Together they sat huddling before the fire, the blankets around their shoulders, the man's arm about the girl. Strang could reach the wood-pile, and constantly he placed more fuel on the blaze.

But the fire had little more than a psychological effect. Strang kept it going, even

when he could not feel its heat. There was at least some cheer in the light it cast, though the smoke was blinding and suffocating at times.

Daylight came after the seemingly interminable darkness, but it brought no change in their condition. They ate sparingly of the meat and drank the broth. It warmed them, gave them new life, and Allison, despite Strang's protests, gathered more wood. She would toil for an hour at a time and then, weary, cold, drop down to his side for a brief rest.

Generally they were silent, sitting with shoulders pressed together, faces toward the fire. At noon Allison turned to her companion.

"How is your foot?" she questioned dully. "I am ashamed for not having asked before."

"It doesn't hurt so much. I am beginning to think I got off easier than I had hoped. Only the sole seems to be frozen. I can move it without much pain."

She did not speak and after a moment he went on.

"I don't think I'll lose the foot, even the toes. I stopped in time, but the sole is gone."

"You mean it will have to be taken off?"

"Oh, it will come off without any help. It's a good deal like a burn. The effect is the same, I think. One big blister."

"Which means you couldn't walk at all?"

"Not with any great comfort."

"And you whittle away the useless clay and crawl on your hands and knees," she quoted.

"If there's ever any chance to crawl," and he looked up at the storm.

Allison returned to her wood-gathering and at dark they ate more of the meat. The cold had reached through and numbed their minds as well as their bodies. They dozed fitfully at times, only to waken in a nightmare of torture and pain. Once Allison aroused herself and placed a dozen sticks on the fire. When it was going well, when the heat of the flames reached them, she settled back at Strang's side and drew the blankets tightly about them.

"Even if we do live through the storm, even if it should die down, we couldn't travel, could we?" she asked.

"I don't see how. Even if I could crawl after you, breaking trail would be too much

for your strength. You could never do it, all the way to camp."

"And no one could come for us because they couldn't track us after the storm," she added.

"They couldn't possibly."

"Then why should we be so glum in our last hours, Roger? They are the last, but we have them together."

For answer he drew her closer, and she snuggled contentedly at his side.

"God, if I could only walk!" he cried after a time.

"But you can't, and you couldn't walk in this blizzard anyhow. There's only one thing to do—make the best of it. And Roger!"

She turned and placed her arms around his neck and drew his face down.

"We're together, and we know, and Roger, I'm happy. I wish father were safe, but we would both have died, even if I hadn't found you."

"You're the bravest girl in the world, sweetheart," he whispered as he kissed her again and again.

They clung to each other for a time, their cold cheeks pressed tightly, the storm, their plight, everything, forgotten in the exaltation of the moment.

"When did you first love me?" asked Allison with a smile as she at last drew away and looked up at Strang.

"I was sure of it after you had been at my place a week last Summer. When did you make the startling discovery?"

"That you loved me?"

"No," he protested indignantly. "That you loved me."

"I didn't discover it until after I had left camp to look for you. But it must have been long before that. It's strange how love creeps in and gains entire possession before it announces itself or you even suspect it is there."

They talked on for an hour or more, heedless of the cold, of their hunger, of the inevitable ending of it all. They might have been carefree sweethearts in the seclusion of a garden nook, a youth and a girl in the supreme ecstasy of the first mutual confession. Verner, Strang's first reticence and unknown history, the clouds and the barriers that had existed before, none of these obtruded themselves. They two alone counted. Blizzards, impending death, former ties, shadowy past, all were

swept aside by the rapture of the moment.

And so the second night passed, and the second day. When darkness found them for the third time there was less of exaltation in their manner, but no weakening of the spirit came with it. They had continued to fight on, Allison to gather wood, Strang to keep the fire going while she slept, not because there was hope but because it is the nature of the human animal to fight on to the end as is the nature of all aggressive animals.

Late that night Strang let Allison slip gently to the boughs and tucked the blankets about her. When he saw that she had not wakened he took a small piece of tallow from the meat that was left and heated it on a sharp stick. With the hot grease he rubbed the bottom of his frozen foot and then, with great care, slipped on his socks, one over the other. Next followed his moccasin, to be laced snugly about his ankles.

After another glance at Allison he raised himself so that he crouched on his uninjured foot and then stood up. Slowly, carefully, he shifted his weight. Pain twisted his features, but he lifted the uninjured foot, only to drop quickly to his knees.

Again he stood up and looked about. One of his snow-shoes was thrust into the snow behind him, and he drew it out. With this as a cane, he began to hobble into the deep snow around the fire.

It was slow work, painful, irritating toil, but Strang persisted until he had dragged several dry windfalls to the camp. Often, when he stopped, he looked up at the tree-tops and listened.

At last he stopped working and sat down, his elbows on his knees. For a long time he did not move. His eyes were hard, his face stern. The lines of pain had given way to those of deep thought. Not once did he turn to look at the sleeping girl beside him.

And then his jaw-muscles knotted resolutely, his back straightened, and he looked up eagerly at the trees above him. The storm was dying. The wind had a despondent, weakening note. The snow had ceased to fall. As he looked he caught a fleeting glimpse of a star in the cleft of a speeding cloud.

Strang smiled as he built up the fire and placed the last piece of meat in the kettle to boil. When the blaze was going and the

pot simmering, he reached for his snow-shoes. But this time he did not rise. Instead, with his fingers thrust through the toe holes, he began to crawl into the unbroken snow, beating down a path before him with the great webs. His knees sank far in, his progress was slow, but he was smiling when he returned to the fire.

The storm died quickly while he watched the kettle of meat. At three o'clock in the morning there was barely a tremor in the tree-tops above the camp. The sky had cleared until only a few fast flying clouds were to be seen.

At four o'clock he wakened Allison.

"What is it?" she asked, startled and looking about her.

"Only breakfast."

"Breakfast! Have you been up long? What time is it? Oh, the storm is over. But why such an early breakfast. And, Roger, you used the last of the meat!"

She had been looking around and saw that his frozen foot was no longer wrapped in his shirt.

"You don't mean," she demanded, "that you are going to try to get back to camp?"

"Try it anyhow," he said as he nodded slowly.

The chance of life, of returning to her father, of making the fight with Roger, brought instant elation.

"We'll do it, somehow!" she cried bravely.

And then her enthusiasm suddenly vanished. There was no dread of the long, painful, dragging miles ahead of them, of the cold and the hunger. She could endure that. But after? Strang's former restraint had returned. The lover of the night before was gone. The man she had known in the wigwam was in his place. Her heart sank. Fear of what safety meant gripped her.

She did not speak of it, did not question him. Silently she ate breakfast, listening without comment to his description of how he hoped they could win their way back to camp. As silently she helped him in the preparations to start and at last, when they were ready, slipped the toboggan traces over her shoulders.

For an hour they struggled through the spruce, Strang taking his direction from the stars. Slowly he pressed down the snow with his snow-shoes and dragged his body along. Slowly she walked after him, the toboggan at her heels coming to a full stop

with each step. The cold was intense, as it always is after a blizzard, and she was not walking fast enough to keep warm. But she said nothing, did not complain, as the tedious march continued.

At the end of an hour they reached the edge of the spruce, the beginning of the barren. Strang stopped for the first time, laid his snow-shoes on top of the snow and sat down upon them.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "That's warm work. How are you making it?"

"It's too easy. I can't keep warm."

"We didn't go so fast, did we?" he smiled. "You can take the lead for a while. But don't get tired. It will be easier out on the burn. The snow will be harder and not so deep."

Daylight came when they were more than a mile out on the great white plain. Twice they had alternated in the lead. Allison found the work of breaking trail much harder, but it kept her warm. The sun came up and gave them their direction instead of the north star. Once when Allison turned, Strang announced that her nose and both cheeks were frozen. She rubbed them with her bare hands, as he advised, while they kept pressing on.

As it became warmer the stops were more frequent. Generally they did not speak. Strang evidently was in pain and usually sat on his snow-shoes looking at the dark line of spruce on the far side of the big barren. After they had waited a few minutes, one or the other would start.

Though neither had spoken of it, each knew that their next meal must wait until they had reached and passed that dark, distant line, until they had found the caribou Strang had killed the day he left camp.

At noon the spruce was still a mile away. Their progress had become more slow and painful. But all the time they kept pushing on.

The sun was setting when they had finally crossed the barren. Strang was breaking trail and, instead of stopping, pushed on faster than before. He had become far more skilful in the use of the snow-shoes on his hands. His knees no longer held back the tails, and Allison, pulling the toboggan, began to find his pace as much as she could maintain.

Through the short neck of timber they passed to emerge almost at once upon the next barren.

"I'm a little farther off than I expected," admitted Strang after a glance out across the bare expanse. "The caribou are just this side of that little clump of green timber down there. Do you think you could find one of them?"

"I can try."

"The nearest is about fifty yards this side of the green trees. The wind may have blown the snow off as fast as it fell. I'd go, but it would take me too long, and I can have a fire going when you get back." •

Allison took her little ax and started at once, while Strang, dragging the toboggan, pulled himself back into the spruce and began to shovel away the snow for a camping place. He broke off dead branches and twigs and, using his knife, clipped boughs from nearby trees for a bed beside the fire. He hung a kettle full of snow in the blaze and then went out to the edge of the barren to meet Allison carrying a piece of meat.

"It was easy to find," she said. "The wolves had circled all around it. It is strange they didn't touch the carcass. They didn't go within ten feet of it."

"They still get the human scent," Strang explained as they turned back. "We'll have to muss things up a bit tomorrow so they will keep away until we can haul it to camp."

They chopped the frozen meat into small pieces and stewed it only half an hour because of their hunger. While it was cooking Strang cut wood and Allison hauled it to the fire. After supper they gathered more in the darkness until Strang decided that there was enough.

"It will be fifty below at least tonight," he said when he had finished chopping it into short lengths, "and we'll need an all-night blaze. We're so tired we might never wake up."

The work finished, they sat beside the fire discussing the chances of reaching camp. For the first time Allison noted the drawn, haggard face of her companion.

"Your foot!" she exclaimed. "It's worse!"

"It is jumping fairly well. Dragging it that way all day didn't help it any."

Later, when she lay down to sleep, rolled in a blanket, she saw that he continued to sit by the fire, hugging his knee. His mouth was a straight line. His brow was creased, his eyes half closed.

"Roger," she said, sitting up quickly. "You must not sit there and suffer. You must take something. It's foolish, and, besides, you must rest. You can't work like this all day and not sleep at night."

"I'm all right," he answered quietly. "I'd rather sit here a while. You get some sleep."

"But it's absurd, and it taxes your strength so."

She started toward the toboggan to get the medicine-case, but Strang held out his hand.

"No," he said rather sharply. "I won't take anything."

Allison returned to her blanket. The cold and the exertion of the day forced sleep despite the unrest of her mind, and, as she lay beside the fire Strang kept going, she did not even dream. She was awakened by his call to breakfast. He still sat as she had last seen him.



THE day's work began at five o'clock. Allison had rested well and had enough to eat, and she broke trail much of the time. They took fifty pounds of meat when they passed the caribou, a load which made the toboggan pull heavily. But, because of Strang's enforced slow progress, she could haul it without exhaustion.

The day passed, and another night with Strang sitting beside the fire, dozing with his head on his arms. Another day and at sundown they emerged from the timber on to the home lake. Their progress had become more snail-like than ever. Allison had broken trail nearly all day, and even then, despite the labor and crawling pace, she was forced often to wait for him.

Their cheeks, chins and noses were frozen and had begun to peel. Their clothes and skin and hair were blackened and streaked with soot from their camp-fires. Their eyes were wide and staring, their faces drawn and thin. Their movements were slow, tortuous, despondent.

Strang's face cracked into a pitiful smile as they looked across the last mile that lay between them and camp.

"I guess we can make it now," he commented as he sat down on his snow-shoes. "Another mile, two hours, and we'll be there."

Allison, who was ahead, did not comment or turn. She stared across the level sheet of

snow to the shore on which the wigwam stood. A thin, dark line of smoke against the red sky told that Verner and her father were there, were alive. But, somehow, there was little joy in the knowledge. It was a symbol of other things to her, of the southland, home, the old things, the old things that could never be the same again.

"Roger," she suddenly cried, wheeling to where he sat with his head in his hands, "when you thought we couldn't get out, when you believed that it was the end, back there in the blizzard, you showed what you felt. When you saw that there was a chance of our living, you changed. Tell me! Is it because you dare not speak now because you know that, outside again, it can never be?"

He stared at her in wonder, only his eyes asking the question, "How did you know?"

"I knew there was something," she said, "something that kept you silent while there was a chance. But I have the right to know. Is it something I can not share, something I can never help you bear? It can't be, Roger! I would share anything with you."

A new pain distorted his blistered, blackened face, and made him forget his foot and his exhaustion.

"You couldn't!" he cried.

"Couldn't I help?" she pleaded.

"No! No! I made the mistake and I've got to stand the consequences. I couldn't make you share what I have had, what I—"

He stopped for a moment, a sudden hope in his eyes. But they clouded immediately and his face became stern.

"It's impossible," he ended.

"Then why did you bring me back?" she demanded fiercely. "Why did we try to live?"

"I know it's hard," he said gently, "but it's one thing to ruin a life, another to end it. Perhaps that theory is wrong, but one, at least, is not premeditated. Then, there's always some one else, your father. It isn't as if there were no others."

She turned suddenly and started across the lake. Strang, still sitting on a drift, watched her go. For a time he did not move. Then, with greater effort than at any time since the long journey had begun, he picked up his snow-shoes and followed.

CHAPTER XI

VERNER GOES TO WORK

VERNER heard the crunch of Allison's snow-shoes as she approached the wigwam and opened the flap.

"Quick!" she cried before he could speak. "Take the toboggan and go after him. Hurry! Before he freezes."

"Who? Where? What's happened? Where have you been?"

"Never mind. It's Roger. He's out there lying in the snow."

She had slipped off her snow-shoes and was forcing them upon him.

"Follow my trail," she commanded.

"Where have you been?" repeated Verner as he stooped to fasten on the webs. "We thought you were dead."

"Roger froze one foot and couldn't walk. We've been since the blizzard getting here. Please hurry."

"Roger, eh? It's Roger now?"

"Go on!" she commanded fiercely. "He may be dying."

Verner started, but it was not until he was out on the ice that she turned and entered the wigwam.

"Father!" she sobbed as she dropped to her knees beside the couch on which a silent figure lay. "Father!"

"Little girl," the professor whispered. "We thought you were lost, thought— But you're here. And Strang?"

"Keith has gone after him. He is out on the lake only a little way. He dropped from exhaustion."

Quickly she told what had happened since she had left the wigwam. But it was with difficulty that she learned how her father had spent the seven days of her absence.

"We did fairly well," he said feebly. "I'm afraid I'm not much better. And the food is about gone."

"The beans and the rice?"

He nodded and she turned to poke fiercely at the fire.

"There was nothing else, no meat, no rabbits," defended her father.

"But he could have caught more rabbits. I did, and he could do as much. And those things were for you."

She arose and began to prepare a bed for Strang and to heat water for tea. Before she had finished she heard a sound outside

and lifted the flap to see Verner struggling toward her in the toboggan traces.

Together they half carried, half dragged, the unconscious man into the wigwam and laid him beside the fire. After a quick examination, Allison hurried out and chopped a piece of meat from the caribou on the toboggan.

"Did you leave any of the rice?" she asked Verner as she returned.

"There's a little."

She cut the meat into fine bits and set it to simmer at one side of the blaze.

"We'll try to get some tea down his throat."

It was a command rather than a request, and Verner lifted the trader's shoulders while she supported his head and held the cup to his lips.

The scalding liquid choked him, and he opened his eyes to see Allison bending over him.

"I'm sorry, dear," he whispered, "but I couldn't make it."

Verner dropped him back to the bough bed and jumped to his feet angrily.

"But we did make it, Roger," said Allison. "We are safe in the wigwam."

Strang looked around, saw Verner, the professor, the familiar birch-bark shelter.

"You didn't haul me in?" he demanded of the girl.

"No. Keith went out and got you. You fell only a little way out on the lake."

Verner crossed to the foot of Professor Manning's bed and sat down. While Allison put a little rice in the bubbling broth, while she wrapped blankets about Strang and poured more tea between his lips, he sat there without moving, without taking his eyes from the fire.

When he did look up it was with a glance of hatred and bitterness which Strang and Allison unconsciously shared. His straggly beard failed to cover the hard, cruel lines of the selfish man who has met complete defeat. His lowered lids only half masked the futile malice.

He did not move when Allison fed the thickened broth to the trader, nor when Strang had sufficiently recovered his strength to sit up and begin to plan anew.

"The first thing to do is to get in that meat," he said. "We need it, and we need the hides. The wolves will have it after a few days."

No one spoke. Strang looked at Verner and then continued:

"I can't travel yet. I'd only be a hindrance. It's too much for Miss Manning."

"I could go," she volunteered, "but I can't haul much at a time."

"Of course not!" snapped Strang angrily. "Verner is the only one to do it. The trail leads right to the two I killed last. He can't help but find them. I wish I had two feet."

"When will you be able to travel?" asked Verner.

"I can travel now, but I'm no use for anything else. I don't know when that foot will heal."

"I'll go after the meat."

Strang and Allison looked at him sharply. There had been a note of willingness, almost of eagerness, in his tone. But his face was as it had been before.

Early the next morning Verner started. After dark he returned, worn out, lame, sore from the cold and his heavy work. But there was another hundred pounds of meat in camp and two caribou hides.

Strang was much stronger. Only his foot prevented his getting out after wood. But, with the hides to work on, he could sit by the fire and make snow-shoes.

That evening there was more cheer in the wigwam than at any time since the arrival of Allison and Strang. Even Professor Manning asked to be propped up on his couch.

"You're better, father!" exclaimed his daughter.

"I wish I could truthfully tell you so," he replied soberly. "I can only say that I do not feel worse than I did while you were gone. There are peculiar features of this attack, some I have never had before. For instance, I never had rheumatism in my jaws. Even my teeth hurt."

"Teeth!" cried Strang, dropping the hide he was cutting into strips and crawling quickly to the professor's side. "Open your mouth!"

The scientist did so, but Strang could not see until he had made a little torch of birch-bark. After peering into the sick man's mouth he reached in and felt of the teeth. Instantly he dropped the torch into the fire and began to roll up one of the professor's sleeves. With his forefinger he prodded the white flesh, watching it closely as he did so.

Something in Strang's manner, something in the expression of his face as he made

his examination, drew both Verner and Allison to his side. Breathlessly they watched, and breathlessly they waited as he turned and looked at them.

"What is it?" demanded Allison fearfully as she saw Strang's face.

"He hasn't got rheumatism at all."

"Hasn't rheumatism!" repeated Verner. "He hasn't been——"

"No," interrupted the trader quickly. "It's scurvy."

"Scurvy!"

Allison repeated the word with the loathing and horror most of us have for this disease of distant places.

"I thought salt meat caused that," said Verner.

"It does. But a monotonous diet, poor nutrition from improper food or lack of vegetables will cause it as well. Did you bring any of the lime-juice tablets you used last Summer in your drinking water?"

"They were all gone before we started up here," answered Allison. "But is there something else we can do, something to stop it, or check it?"

"Vegetables, fresh fruit, lemons, lime-juice," laughed Strang mockingly. "There is nothing here, nothing that will do the least good."

"And if we can't do anything, can't stop it?" asked the girl.

"His teeth are loose, his gums are bleeding. In time the teeth will drop out, the bones become soft. His flesh dents in now."

Little more was said in the wigwam that night. Strang sat and cursed to himself because of his foot. Allison, completely discouraged at last, sat beside her father, holding one of his hands. Only Verner seemed to be free from the depression.

"If we ever get out, we should strike for some Hudson's Bay Company post, not yours, shouldn't we?" he asked of Strang.

"It would be better. They might have more of the things he needs."

"How far is the nearest?"

"About 150 miles. It is the post north of my place."

"Then we would go past your post and stop there?"

"No. I'd follow our back trail only to the next lake. A stream comes into it from the north. This drains a little lake on the height of land, and another stream from the same lake flows north to Deer river, which empties into the lake at the post."

"That would be an easy route, with ice all the way."

"Much easier than the way we came, and it's good ice, too."

"I think I saw that stream where it empties into the next lake."

"Probably," answered Strang, engrossed again in his hide cutting. "It's the only one on the north shore."

Verner was gone early the next morning to return at night with another load of caribou meat. He was not so tired, and he sat beside the fire after supper and watched Strang weaving the webbing in Allison's snow-shoes. He even asked after the trader's foot.

"Doesn't hurt much," was the curt reply.

"But how is it healing? How long before you can walk?"

"Don't know. The dead skin and flesh have got to come off and some more grow on again, I guess."

The next day Verner made a third trip and brought in the last of the two caribou. Only Strang himself could find the three killed before the storm.

"And the wolves probably have them by now," suggested Verner.

"Perhaps."

"And we've got to have more before we can start out?"

"Of course."

"Foot any better?"

"It's got to have time."

But, though Verner talked with Strang and Professor Manning, he ignored Allison. Twice he caught the girl studying him, but each time he stared at her until she looked away.

Strang was too busy with his own troubles, his own planning, to notice the change in Verner's manner. He had only contempt for the man, and even the three days' work of hauling meat had not raised him in the trader's opinion.

Verner was the last to go to bed. After the others were asleep he sat beside the fire, apparently unfatigued by his day's work. His eyes were lighted with a new expression, the sullen lines around his mouth had disappeared.

And then Verner did a strange thing. When he went to bed he did not roll up in his blanket. Instead, he lay with it under his head, while fully dressed, he stretched out beside the fire. Sleep came to him in time, but it was of the fitful, uncomfortable

sort. The fire died down and he became cold. Twice he arose to rebuild it, each time glancing at his watch.

The third time he did not place more wood on the coals. Instead, with his blanket under his arm, one of the three kettles in his other hand and the caribou robe tucked between the blanket and his body, he stepped softly over Strang, stooped and went through the door.

It was very cold, the sky very clear, the stars shining through the tree-tops. But Verner did not notice these things. Walking carefully, for even his moccasins crunched on the hard, brittle snow, he took the toboggan from where it leaned against a tree and carried it out into the deep snow away from the lake. He returned, gathered up the things he had taken from the wigwam and lashed them to the toboggan with strips of caribou hide.

From the trees near the wigwam he took two hind legs of the caribou. Before his last trip he picked up the ax that leaned against the wigwam and waited a moment at the door to listen.

There was no sound, no flare of a rebuilt fire. He took his snow-shoes to the toboggan and lashed on the meat.

Again he listened, waited. There was no sound, no light. He slipped on the webs, adjusted the loops of the traces over his shoulders and started quickly southward, toward the next lake and the little stream that would take him over to Deer River and the Hudson's Bay Company post.

CHAPTER XII

RETRIBUTION

PERHAPS Keith Verner himself was not so much to blame. Ruthless forebears, ruthless business methods, a ruthless viewpoint, these had been enough to raise selfish tendencies to the ruthless stage. Then, in his entire life, he had always done everything he wished to do, had had everything he desired.

Since his arrival at Roger Strang's trading-post everything had been changed. Money did not count. His ability was worthless. He was not of the physical type that can adapt itself to new, rough, dangerous conditions.

Strang had been antagonistic from the first. Verner believed he had made the

trip as hard as possible, not once showing mercy for sore muscles and tender skin.

Then had come the days in the wigwam, the cold, the craving for good food, the rebellion against conditions which kept him a helpless prisoner. He had stood these things with no better grace than his life's training permitted, but, on top of all, had come the theft of his chosen mate.

Deliberately, before his eyes, this man had won her. Deliberately she had turned from him, turned from all the things he had to offer to the purely muscular power of a man who could not give her anything else, whose record would not permit him to continue the spell he had cast about her.

The bitterness and the resentment of the weary weeks in the wigwam, the professor's serious illness, the long absence of Allison and Strang, the trader's injury, the seemingly unsurmountable obstacles the four faced, these and the loathing for him Allison could no longer conceal, had finally combined to brew within the Chicagoan's heart a hatred and a bitterness which drove out everything else.

Why shouldn't he, he argued to himself. The girl for whom he had made the sacrifices of the trip had turned against him. The chances of their getting out alive diminished each day. Why should he sacrifice himself for those who hated him, for whom he himself had only hatred? Strang would have done the same.

Of course, he would send back a relief expedition, hire men and dogs and dispatch them at once to the wigwam. And he would hire other men, and other dogs, and fly southward as fast as they could travel, out of this cursed land of cold and famine and brutish men, this land where women found new gods to worship.

The three days spent hauling caribou meat had convinced Verner that he could make the trip. He had done the work as a test. He had taken a heavy load and had made good time. One hundred and fifty miles! He should do it in six days easily.

But the stretch of forest before he came to the first lake, the lake into which flowed the little stream that would lead him to Deer river, brought its troubles. The snow was deep and soft beneath the trees. He floundered heavily, and the toboggan pulled so hard at times that it jerked him back and caused one snow-shoe to rest on the other and trip him.

The lake offered fresh difficulties. The wind had packed and carved the drifts so that the surface was not at all unlike the broken ice-fields of the polar regions. There was a hard crust to support his webs, but pulling the toboggan became far more difficult.

Verner hurried on as fast as he could. The hard work brought perspiration to dampen his underclothing and to run down from beneath his heavy cap. But, as he got farther from shore, the surface became more uneven. Drifts had been piled up and carved out so that three-foot walls confronted him. He had loaded the toboggan heavily at the front end and the nose caught each drift he encountered.

Angry, cursing, Verner struggled on. He struck good going for a few yards and broke into a lope. He must hurry. He must make twenty-five miles a day, and the days were so short. He must not get stranded without food.

The toboggan scraped behind him, sluing sideways from his violent tugs at the traces. He came to a steep-walled drift and climbed it. The toboggan caught solidly and jerked him back so that he lost his balance and fell. Angry, impatient, Verner tugged at the traces. The toboggan would not move. He reached down, loosened the hood and jerked at it violently.

There was a snap, a sharp cry, and he rolled over on to the snow, his mittened hands covering his face. The wires that had stayed the hood had broken. One loose end had whipped upward and slashed open the ball of his right eye.

For a moment Verner lay quietly. Then the pain struck through and he rolled back and forth on top of the hard drift. When he had mastered his panic he removed his hands. He could not see.

For a time he sat there stunned. Then the cold bit through. He staggered to his feet, took a faltering step and collapsed in terror. A wolf howled far back on a low ridge to the south. Another answered it. Verner groveled down against the hard surface of the snow.



QUIETLY as Verner had left the wigwam in the early morning, his absence had been known immediately. Allison had been lying awake. The peril they faced, the threatened starvation of all four, the discovery that her father

suffered from a disease that demanded immediate attention, these, added to the resumption of the old relations between Roger Strang and herself after those three days together in the blizzard, had brought sleeplessness when the cold awakened her in the morning.

It had been too dark for her to see Verner leave, but she had heard him moving about outside. But even his prolonged absence was of no significance until an hour had passed. Then she heard Strang rebuilding the fire.

"Roger," she whispered, "he has gone."

"I thought I heard something a while ago. He's up early."

"Yes, but why? You don't suppose——"

"Suppose what?"

"He has gone."

The flames now lighted Strang's face and she saw him smile.

"He wouldn't dare," he laughed. "And, besides, where would he go?"

Allison got up from her bed and knelt beside the fire.

"You were telling him of that route to the Hudson's Bay post. He was interested."

"Nonsense. No man would desert us that way."

"He let father go off to die."

Strang looked up in amazement.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, and Allison told of Verner's actions and admissions.

He did not reply but sat staring incredulously at the fire. Allison, driven by her fear, went outside. In a moment she was back.

"He has gone," she whispered tensely. "He's taken the toboggan and some meat. See! His blanket is gone, and the ax isn't outside the door."

"The ax!" exclaimed Strang. "He took the ax and left us here without one! The——"

He did not finish the sentence aloud, though Allison heard him as he reached under his blanket.

"Where are you going?" she demanded as he brought out his rifle, threw a cartridge into the barrel and arose.

"To get him!" he answered harshly.

"But your foot!"

"I'll forget about it."

He went outside, Allison dragging at his arm.

"No! No!" she pleaded. "It would do no good. You must not waste the strength and energy on him."

"But he took the ax!"

"We can get along, and there is my hatchet. You'll only get out there yourself and be unable to get back. And there is no toboggan for me to haul you."

"He took the ax!" repeated Strang doggedly as he shook himself free. "He might as well have cut our throats while we slept."

He pushed her aside roughly and slipped on his snow-shoes.

"Don't worry," he said as he started on Verner's trail. "I'll get back all right."

Strang really did forget his foot as he walked rapidly in Verner's trail. The raw, blistered, swollen sole failed to penetrate with its message of torture to his raging, red-veiled consciousness.

"He took the ax!" he muttered savagely to himself as he pressed on. "He took the ax!"

On the shore of the lake he looked eagerly out over the wind-carved drifts. There was still no sign of dawn, but the sky was clear, the stars bright, and the snow was a white expanse upon which any moving object would be seen.

But Strang saw nothing. Nor could he find tracks on the hard, frozen surface. He did not stop, however, but kept on toward the mouth of the little stream on the north shore.

A quarter of a mile out he was still going with the force and determination that had started him from the wigwam. His rifle, ready, swung from his right hand. Steadily he pressed on, not even seeming to hear the howl of a wolf on the south shore.

Again the wolf howled and, as the long, wailing note rang out over the lake, Strang saw something move on his left. He stopped, straining his eyes in the darkness and then saw a black object toward the west.

Instantly his rifle snapped up and cracked. Down went the fleeing figure, to lie quiet on the drift.

"I was shooting ahead, but I don't mind if I did get him," muttered Strang as he turned toward the dark spot on the snow.

It was Verner, moaning, lying face downward, one hand across his eyes.

"Where did I get you?" asked Strang roughly as he turned the other over.

Verner only cried out in pain and terror, still pressing his hands to his face.

"Where did I hit you?" repeated Strang.

"The wire! The toboggan! I'm blinded! Blind!"

"Blind? Wire?"

Strang stood up and looked around in bewilderment. Back toward the shore a little way was the toboggan. He ran to it and found the hood straightened out, the wire stays broken. For a moment he looked at it in awed silence.

"A man has no business fooling with the administration of justice in the bush," he muttered as he turned back. "Retribution is generally quick enough."

His manner was no longer rough when he again stooped over the moaning runaway. "Brace up," he said. "Can you see at all?"

"Nothing. I'm blind!"

"Got both eyes?" questioned Strang incredulously.

"Only one. But I can't open the other."

He shivered from the cold, and Strang lifted him to a sitting position.

"Brace up," he repeated. "You've got to get back. You can walk if I guide you, can't you?"

Verner allowed the other to help him to his feet and stood alone, one hand still across his eyes.

"Now, careful," said the trader, holding the man's free arm. "I'll tell you the bad steps."

Slowly they went back to the toboggan, where Strang stopped to tie his rifle on top of Verner's blanket and to adjust the traces to his shoulders.

"Now we can start," he said cheerfully. "It isn't far, and we'll get there soon. Then we can fix you up."

Silently Verner staggered and stumbled along. Strange's strong arm held him up, his voice advised and cheered. Once Verner slipped and tumbled down the side of a drift. The trader laughed as he helped him up.

"That's the first. But we're near the shore."

When they reached the timber Verner stopped and pulled his arm from Strang's grip.

"Your foot?" he asked. "How are you walking?"

"Oh, a fellow can do quite a bit when he has to in this country."

"It wasn't worth it, Strang," said Verner humbly. "I don't deserve this. I was running away, leaving you crippled and helpless."

"Sure. I know it. And when I caught you I would have shot you or given you the worst beating you ever heard of, depending on how I happened to feel. But somebody was ahead of me."

"Somebody? You don't think that there is——"

"I don't know, but there's the facts."

Strang started on, dragging the toboggan, Verner stumbling along behind. Half-way through to the home lake he stopped and called out.

"What is it?" asked the trader.

"I just want to tell you that this isn't the only dirty thing I've done. I told Allison, told her you had a record in the States, couldn't go back, that you were wanted down there."

Strang did not comment and Verner, finding confession good, rushed on.

"I was lying, Strang, but I saw that she was beginning to think more of you than of me. I was losing, and I was desperate. I would have killed you. But I'll square it. I'll tell her I don't know anything, which is the truth."

For a moment the trader was silent. Then he turned toward the wigwam.

"No," he said as he started. "Let it go as it is."

CHAPTER XIII

THE START

WELL, nurse, you'll have to enlarge your hospital," said Strang after breakfast.

Allison looked around the wigwam, at her father lying silently on his couch, at Verner pressing a palm against the bandage over his eyes, at Strang evidently suffering from his journey of the early morning.

"I am nurse, cook, chore boy, and all," she laughed. And then she added soberly: "It's funny we should be so cheerful about it. And your foot is worse."

"Yes, but it will get better. He's the one that needs sympathy. He's lost an eye."

"I got off easily," said Verner quietly, the first time he had spoken since Strang had brought him back. "I deserved more than this."

"No! No!" said Allison gently. "Not the loss of an eye!"

"I should have spoken about that hood," added Strang. "Until the wood sets in that position there is a big strain on the wires."

But, despite the cheerfulness of Strang and Allison, the strain was too much for them to continue in that rôle all day. Verner was in great pain and the sympathetic influence upon the other eye had rendered him totally blind. Strang's foot was badly swollen and very painful. Professor Manning was weak and slept most of the time.

To Allison fell all the work. She gathered wood, a task becoming more and more difficult as that near camp was exhausted. She prepared the meals, melted water with which to bathe and dress Strang's foot, and cut and carried in fresh boughs for the beds.

No one spoke of the increased peril which now faced them. Verner was able to work but could not see. Strang could not walk. The professor was unable even to rise. For a while they could continue as they were. There was enough meat. Allison could get wood to keep them warm. But after that?"

Two days passed. Verner suffered less pain. Strang again stood on one foot and even hobbled a bit. The professor sat up and took part in the conversation. The third day Strang limped out and sent Allison back to the wigwam while he cut wood. When he had three toboggan loads he called. She helped him drag it to the wigwam, where he cut it into short lengths.

"That's doing better," he said. "It won't be long now."

She looked at him silently. Each knew that the other was thinking and Strang finally spoke.

"Don't worry. It's a slow affair, and we'll get to some potatoes and dried fruit, and may be lime-juice tablets, before it gets too far."

Impulsively she started toward him, extending both hands.

"You're the bravest man I ever knew, Roger," she whispered, "the bravest and the best."

For an instant he returned the pressure of her fingers, even started to draw her toward him. Then he dropped her hands and turned quickly away. Allison, the light suddenly gone from her eyes, entered the wigwam.

The next day Strang cut still more wood

and that night, after supper, he turned to Verner.

"If I put you between the traces of the toboggan and break trail, you ought to be able to follow me and pull a bit, hadn't you?" he asked.

"Of course," was the eager response. "I can't see, but I could do fairly well on a good trail."

"The trail will be all right. There has been no snow since you went over it, and it is frozen as hard as a sidewalk."

"You mean you are going after the meat and the hides?" asked Allison anxiously.

"We'll try it."

"But it is too far."

"We'll carry our blankets and a kettle and take two days if necessary."

They did have to take two days, and it was long after dark the second night when they came limping, stumbling, up to the wigwam.

"One more trip will do it," said Strang after supper.

"We'll start in the morning," added Verner.

The second trip was accomplished without incident and the next day was spent in thawing meat and removing the bones, in sewing together the new caribou hides, repairing the toboggan and snow-shoes and constructing traces and collars for all three.

"I am in better condition for hard work than either of you, and I can pull as well and travel as fast," Allison had said defiantly when Strang outlined his plans for the start the next morning, and he had accordingly cut long strips of rawhide so that, with their snow-shoes, all three could pull the toboggan with its heavy load.

There was excitement in the wigwam that night. At last the long hoped for start was at hand. Final preparations were few. Strang had made the toboggan long enough so that there was room for Professor Manning to lie at full length on the blankets and robes and also for their supplies. The meat had been boned and frozen again. The professor's notes had been packed. None of his specimens or instruments were to be taken, nothing that would add weight and be of no value to them on their journey.

Before bedtime Strang told them frankly and soberly what was to be expected.

"We're not out yet," he ended. "We've got to break trail for one hundred and fifty miles. We've got to sleep out each night.

We've got a big load to haul. It's going to be very cold, and there may be a blizzard before we get there. If it comes, we've got to wait in camp until it's over.

"The trip is going to take all we've got, all our strength and nerve and optimism. It's a big job for big men, and we're three cripples and a woman."

It sobered them, but it brought new determination, fresh resolution.

Strang was up early and had breakfast ready before he called the others. After the meal Allison helped him prepare the toboggan for the professor. Verner was still unable to see, and, at their suggestion, remained by the fire until they were ready to start.

Out under the stars, the cold air burning her nostrils, the familiar crunch of the brittle snow beneath her moccasins, Allison stood looking absently toward the northeast, toward the place where she had found Roger, where they had lived through the blizzard together. The trader, folding a blanket, working rapidly, looked up and saw her.

"Give me a hand, please," he said. "We must make as good a bed for him as possible."

She turned and looked down to where he knelt beside the toboggan but she did not offer to help.

"Roger," she demanded, "do you think we should start, that it is the wisest thing to do?"

"Sure," he replied cheerfully. "It is the only thing. Verner can pull, even if he can't see, and that's all the help we need."

"I'm afraid of him," she whispered. "He's willing just because he thinks he sees a way to escape. He hates us, Roger, hates us, and he's shown that there is nothing he won't do to help himself, no matter what the consequences to us."

"Nonsense. Don't you see? He's a different man, not the same fellow who came up here with me."

"That's impossible. He couldn't change like that. Why, Roger, his mind is distorted and diseased by hatred and bitterness and jealousy. I wouldn't trust him a moment."

Strang spread the blanket carefully and neatly, patting and pulling out the wrinkles, turning it under at one end for a pillow. Then he looked up and spoke quietly.

"In the life of nearly every man there comes a time when he is changed completely. Some one, big thing wipes out old characteristics and firmly establishes new, gives him a soul or takes it away, makes a man of him or a wreck. It may be getting married or losing a fortune, getting religion or robbing a bank. But always, from that time on, he is entirely different. Keith has had such an experience, and you can depend upon him now."

"Perhaps," she admitted doubtfully, "but, after what has happened, I couldn't trust him. There would always be the fear."

She was silent a moment and then she broke out fiercely:

"But it isn't that. He doesn't count any more in anything. I don't want to go back! I can't! I won't! After this, Roger, don't you see what it means? What is there to go back for? What is there better than what we have right here? An empty stomach doesn't hurt like an empty heart. Why do we have to go?"

"But we can't live here like this any longer."

"Live! What will we live for? Why do we fight for something we don't want? Father is old, he has lived a happy, successful life. He has accomplished up here the things he has always dreamed of. He'll only die on the way out. He can't stand it. And there's nothing in living for us. Give it up! Let's not make the fight. I'm so afraid, so afraid we'll win."

Strang had been crouching beside the toboggan. When the girl finished and covered her face with her hands he did not move. But when the sound of her sobs reached him he sprang up, leaped toward her and gathered her trembling, convulsive figure in his arms.

"Little sweetheart!" he whispered. "Little sweetheart! There's everything to live for, everything to fight for! We've got to get out, we've got to live, you and I!"

She pushed back her head and looked up at him. Her tears were frozen on her cheeks, her eyes staring wide in wonder and dawning joy. Then her face suddenly clouded, and she clung to him desperately.

"But Verner!" she whispered. "What of him? He said he would——"

"I never considered Verner," he replied exultantly. "He never counted with me. The fact that you were engaged never

would have held me back. I'd have fought through anything for you if——"

"That's it," she interrupted. "That's why I'm afraid. He told me he knew, Roger, and that he'd send them after you."

Strang only laughed.

"But he could! He would! He's that sort!"

"No one ever caused me any trouble except myself, and no one ever can," he answered soberly. "There has never been anything outside of myself, girl, to keep me from anything."

"But——"

It questioned fully, and she stared up at his face.

"I know. You think I'm a fugitive from justice, or something like that. I've only been a fugitive from myself. But I'm not any longer. I'm free now, sweetheart, and we're going out, going out together, you and I. Isn't it worth fighting for?"

For Allison it was enough. She clung to him in her joy. There were no further questions in her mind.

"We'll win, Roger, we'll win!" she repeated over and over.

He held her away from him a moment and looked into her eyes, in which there was only happiness, faith and hope.

"You brick!" he exclaimed. "I'm doubly sure now. I can't lose. Listen. My last year in college I was hurt playing football. I had a nasty time of it, a great deal of pain, and in the hospital they quieted me often with morphine. When I got out the pain persisted, and so did the drug. At twenty-two I was a wreck.

"I took a cure, and I slipped at once. I tried the cure again, but it didn't last. Before I was too far gone I took things into my own hands. I went West to a ranch, punched cattle, kept away from all chances of getting it. It worked. I was free.

"And then a horse threw me, and walked around on me, and I was pretty well smashed up again. A doctor came fifty miles. He brought morphine, and I was back at the bottom.

"I got out of there and tried a job with a big fruit company in Central America. I was away from everything and getting back into shape. Just as I thought I could be sure of myself, just when I began to plan on getting back to the States, a crate slipped out of a sling when I was loading a cargo one day and rolled me over. The

ship's doctor did the usual thing, and when I got back home the drug had me.

"I was ready to quit. Luck and fate seemed to be against me too, and, with the drug, it was too much. I took one last brace, however, and came up here. I got over all desire, all craving, but the fear remained. I didn't dare go back. Something would happen, there would be the accident, then the drug, and I knew I never could make the fight again."

He stopped, and the girl, pity, admiration and remorse in her eyes, drew back.

"And I offered it to you, urged you to take it!" she whispered.

"But you didn't know, and I'm glad, little sweetheart. It put me to the test, for that was some pain back there in the swamp, when the blizzard was on. And when we got back here, after all that dragging, it was worse.

"At first I was glad. I thought I could be sure of myself. And then I thought that it might be you that helped me then, that I might slip later. Don't you see? That's why I didn't speak, why I didn't tell you there was hope. I wanted something more than hope. I wanted certainty.

"And, if I had told, you would have wanted to help, you would have believed there was a chance. It was better for us both that you believed it impossible.

"But I'm certain now. It's been a long pull, since I went through the ice, and the bright little needle and its comfort have been before me all the time. But I haven't wanted it once. I'm as sure of myself now as though it had never been."

With a little cry she swayed back into his arms.

"I thought you were a brave man before, dearest. But I didn't know how brave a man could be."

For an instant they clung to each other. Then Allison pushed herself free.

"Hurry!" she cried excitedly. "Let's get started. We're going out, Roger, you and I! Going out to live!"

CHAPTER XIV

VERNER'S CHANCE

IF THERE had been any doubt as to the ability of those in the wigwam to make the hazardous journey before them, it had vanished in the minds of two at least.

Strang scarcely felt the pain in his foot as he helped carry Professor Manning out to the toboggan. Allison, laughing, encouraging, ran in and out with blankets and ket-tles. Her high spirits were contagious. Professor Manning smiled as he was tied on, blankets and robes lashed thickly about him. Verner, impatient because of his helplessness, felt his way out to the toboggan and into his place between the traces.

At last Strang took his position in the lead, Allison behind him.

"Ready?" called the trader as he looked back.

"Ready," answered Verner eagerly.

But Allison was looking at the wigwam and did not reply. Smoke was drifting from the hole in the peak. An occasional spark rushed out madly to stop suddenly and waver slowly among the branches until it was gone. The flap over the door was thrown back and they could see the bough beds beside the fire, the smoke-blackened poles and the yellow birch-bark of the walls. The girl turned at last, and Strang saw her wink back the tears.

"It was home, Roger," she whispered as she leaned toward him. "Our home."

Their high spirits were needed in that day of disheartening toil. Out on the lake, where the wind had cut and packed the drifts, where the darkness made travel almost as difficult for Strang and Allison as for Verner, progress was only a succession of vexations and heavy labor. The toboggan had to be lifted up over snow-banks and eased down carefully on the other side, and night found them only as far as the little lake on the height of land.

"Less than ten miles," said Strang when camp was made and supper cooking. "But the worst of it is over. River travel won't be so bad."

At five o'clock, four hours before daylight, they started. Steadily, with only rare halts for rest, they kept on until eleven, when a fire was built and lunch heated. Then, before the coals had died out, they were on their way again. Strang, breaking trail, set a pace which the others could maintain only because they had better going.

Whether Professor Manning suffered from the cold, from the jolting of the toboggan over rough places, from his cramped position beneath the blankets and lashings, no one ever knew. At every halt Allison slipped out of her shoulder-straps and went

back to him. Always he greeted her with a smile, with a cheerful comment or question as to the progress.

Verner, too, would feel his way back to the toboggan with words of encouragement for the man who accepted what must have been torture at times without complaint. Perhaps it was to gain strength for the fight he himself was making, for he, too, must have suffered much pain. Like Professor Manning, he accepted everything without complaint. He was always ready for the start, never in the way during the hurry of camp-making, never faltered in his strain at the traces.

It was across the tightly lashed body of the scientist that he and Allison resumed friendly relations. Neither began it, made the first advances. No other spirit could prevail in the sweet presence of the stricken man. Nor would Allison's heart, light, joyous, bursting with happiness, permit resentment to remain.

It was in one of these short stops for rest, when Strang sat down in his place to make the most of his breathing-spell, and Allison and Verner had gone back to the toboggan, that Verner discovered he was no longer entirely blind. He had lifted the bandage from his left eye and then quickly replaced it.

"I can see, Allison!" he whispered, his voice trembling with excitement.

"Oh, Keith! I'm so glad!"

"The light blinds me a little, but I saw you and the toboggan."

"You must be careful not to strain your good eye. Keep the bandage on."

Strang had heard them and came back.

"That's fine," he said heartily when Verner told him. "But be careful and go slow. Maybe in a day or so you can use it a little."

But the little party needed all its cheerfulness. The snow was deep, the cold intense, the days short. Camp was made and broken in the darkness. It was difficult to get fuel under such circumstances, and there was not always enough for an all-night fire. They lay in their blankets and robes close about the little blaze, but their covering was insufficient, and there was not the rest they needed after the hard days on the trail.

Their diet was still the same, stewed caribou meat three times a day, with no salt, no tea, no bread, nothing to break the mo-

notony. Their faces were blackened by camp-fire smoke, cracked and blistered by the frost. Their hands were rough, bleeding. Always their legs ached from the toil of the steady lifting of heavy snow-shoes, their shoulders from the strain of the traces.

And their progress was not what they had hoped for. The load was heavy on the freshly broken trail. Strang assumed all the work of breaking the way, but, though he did not complain, though the others did not know it, he suffered intensely from the pain in his foot. At night it throbbed and swelled, and he got little sleep. At the end of five days he was traveling on nerve alone.



ONLY the trader knew that they were not making the progress he had counted upon. To the others the weary, dragging hours meant far greater distances than were really covered. His experience and his knowledge of the country told him the real miles were far less than they appeared to be.

Roger was not afraid that their food would not last. He had taken all the meat they could drag, enough to last them three weeks. But he was afraid of their strength, of the barriers the Winter would place in their way. Something of this must have been communicated to the others, and a grim determination rather than a smiling optimism kept them going.

"It's the snow-shoes," Strang muttered when, on the seventh day, he was at last forced to relinquish the place in the lead to Allison. "I can't handle one with that foot."

But the girl, despite her courage, could not long maintain the pace in front. It was heavy, gruelling work for a man, breaking trail in the heavy snow all day, more than most men could stand. She kept at it until she did not have the strength to lift her snow-shoes, and their rests became more frequent and of longer duration.

For two days this continued, and there were hardly twenty miles to their credit as a result. Verner offered to go ahead, for he could see in the half light. But when the sun was shining on the snow he had to wear a bandage over his eyes.

Camp was a quiet, dreary place that second night. No one spoke. No one made predictions as to the morrow, as had been their custom. They ate their supper, spread their blankets and caribou hides on the

hastily piled boughs and went to sleep.

Before daylight the next morning, before they had been an hour on the trail, good fortune came for the first time in all the dreary weeks of the Winter. Allison, fresh and determined, had broken trail since the start. Down the frozen surface of the river she had ploughed the way, Strang and Verner tugging at the traces behind her. It was the coldest hour of the twenty-four, when bodies shivered and faces burned with a pain that seemed at times almost unendurable.

Suddenly Allison veered to the right. Verner followed. But she had turned too quickly, and Strang could not get the long toboggan around the angle. He was about to grumble when he heard the clatter of Allison's snow-shoes on something hard and then her shout.

"It's a trail, a trail!" she cried almost hysterically.

Strang slipped out of the traces and pushed forward.

"Some one going down to the post," he said as he knelt in the deep trench. "Indian probably."

"Is it a chance for us to get help?" asked Verner.

"Not likely. But it's a chance for us to get out, unless it snows. We've got good going now."

They took off their snow-shoes and lashed them on top of the toboggan.

"Fine," said Strang as they started again and he limped quickly behind the others. "Now we can travel."

And they did travel that day. Crippled, blinded, worn, poorly nourished, the three pressed on. The toboggan slipped along with half the former tugging, and the speed doubled with their feet on the hard, smooth path.

It was a happy stop at noon. Smiles wrinkled the blackened skin of their faces. Conversation was general and cheerful. Hopes were again high.

"Another day after this will do it," prophesied Strang, and his words brought new courage, for it was his first prediction since they had left the wigwam.

They traveled late that night and, when they did stop in a likely-looking swamp, they found, after clearing a place for the camp with their snow-shoes, that good wood was to be had only a little farther down the river. Strang and Allison went after it,

leaving Verner with the "toy hatchet" to cut boughs for the beds. As usual, Professor Manning was left wrapped up on the toboggan out on the trail until camp was made and a fire going.

Roger and Allison went on down the river for a hundred yards without finding wood. The moon had just come up and, with the bright reflecting surface of the snow, afforded wonderful light.

"There's some dry pine," said Roger, pointing farther down-stream. "We'll cut that and haul it back with the toboggan. There's enough birch near the camp."

They went on and soon his ax was biting into a dry stub.

"We'll draw up the whole logs," he suggested when it fell, "and have a real fire to-night."

He began cutting the stub into lengths and Allison drew back from the flying chips.

"I'll go back for the toboggan," she called as she started campward.

But she had not taken a dozen steps before she stopped.

"Roger!" she cried. "Roger! What is that? Come, quick!"

He stopped a moment and listened.

"What?" he asked, but he did not wait for an answer. A snarl, a howl, a shout, and then a chorus of blood-chilling yelps echoed down the river, and he saw a compact mass of dark bodies bearing down upon the toboggan to which Professor Manning was lashed.

"They're after father!" cried Allison, as Strang, his ax in his hand, sprang past her.

But it was only in despair that he ran on. The long, leaping bodies were only a few yards away, and he was two hundred. Even if he did get there! His very hopelessness urged him on faster.

And then, seen clearly against the snow in the moonlight, another object dashed into the scene. Shouting, waving his little ax, plunging frantically forward, Verner, too, was racing toward the toboggan.

They reached it together, he and the pack. Strang saw the long, leaping shapes hesitate, then stop a few feet away and begin to circle. A bolder one dashed in, only to spring back as the ax flashed at him. Then three rushed at once from the other side, and Verner, backed up against the toboggan, struck furiously.

For a moment Strang thought he had gone down and cursed as he ran. But the

rush eddied back and Verner still stood on his feet. Again they came at him, half attacking from the front, the other half from the rear and tearing at the meat on the toboggan.

Strang was close now, saw Verner's swinging blows plainly. And then, as he ran, he suddenly shouted:

"Mush! Mush! Kaw-win!"

Instantly the pack retreated, only to form again and begin to circle as Strang dashed up to Verner's side.

"Mush!" he repeated. "Get out of this, you ninny-mushers. Git!"

He slipped his rifle from beneath the lashings and whirled. The moonlight was reflected from the bright metal and instantly the animals dashed in all directions for cover. Strang fired once, twice, again, but only one leaping flight was halted.

"Did they get you?" he asked anxiously, turning to Verner.

He did not need to ask. The man's clothing was slashed, blood streamed from a long cut on one cheek, and one hand was torn.

But, as he faced the moonlight, there was no pain, no terror, in the bloody, bandaged face of Verner, only a pride and an elation which lifted his head and reset his shoulders with almost the swagger of the physical conqueror.

"Gad, that was close!" he exclaimed. "They nearly got him!"

Strang merely stepped across the toboggan and shook hands with Verner, shook with a grip that the other returned eagerly, almost gratefully.

"Keith!" cried Allison, rushing up and grasping his other hand. "It was the bravest thing! The very bravest."

Tears ran from her eyes, and she held Verner's hand in both of hers.

"I didn't know wolves got so bold," he said in an effort to hide his sudden confusion.

"They weren't wolves," corrected Strang.

"Not wolves!"

"They were a bunch of sledge dogs running wild, as they sometimes do, or strayed from an Indian's camp and hunting their own meat. They're half-starved most of the time and sometimes get desperate. That's why they ran when they saw the rifle. A wolf wouldn't have known what it was."

"But," protested Allison, "a wolf couldn't have been more ferocious."

"Less so," said Roger. "A wolf would have taken time to think it over. The dogs, and they are really more than half wolf, know enough about men and, when they are hungry, are not so cautious. They smelled the meat on the toboggan and were desperate enough to kill a man to get it. Nor would they have distinguished between the caribou and Professor Manning. It was worse than a bunch of wolves would have been."

Strang's prediction that there would be only one more day served as a spur when they started down river the next morning. Hour after hour they went as fast as their exhaustion and pain would permit. Their stops were few and short. Impatience and hope drove stiff muscles and aching limbs to the trail again, but darkness found them without a sign of the journey's end.

Grimness succeeded the enthusiasm of the morning and they maintained the dog-trot of the earlier hours. Verner, his bandage off, was in the lead, Allison next, Strang limping ahead of the toboggan.

"There it is!" called the Chicagoan as he rounded a bend in the river. "There's a light!"

"The post!" sobbed Allison hysterically.

"The post!"

"We're nearly there, Professor," Strang called back to the toboggan. "There's a light ahead."

It was a long way ahead, down a straight stretch of river, but the flickering, yellow dot in the distance served as an intoxicant.

For a time they pressed on silently, quickly. Then, as the shock of the realization that they were safe began to diminish, there were eager comments. Strang voiced anticipations of the first meal with potatoes and bread and sugar. Allison was rapturous over the care her father would soon receive. Verner, silent, only went faster, sometimes breaking into a lope.

It was a sharp, stiff tug up the bank, a last effort that completely sapped their strength, and legs that had been moving swiftly, steadily, suddenly became weak and uncertain. Strang knocked at the door and the next moment they were inside.

The Company's trader's first care was for the man on the toboggan. After a quick examination he assured them that he would have him around in a few days.

"I've got just the thing for him," he said confidently.

Roger was in worse shape than the others had known and was put to bed immediately. Verner's cuts were washed and bound. Allison felt only drowsiness after the meal to which she, Verner and the trader sat down.

When the Hudson's Bay Company man left them "to look after his patients," as he said with a smile, Allison and Verner took a bench beside the stove, reveling in the warmth. Suddenly she turned toward him and held out her hands impulsively.

"I want you to forgive me, Keith," she whispered, "forgive me for what I have caused you and, more than all, for what I thought of you. It was so splendid, back there on the river last night."

He did not smile as he looked at her steadily for a moment. Then, with a final pressure of his fingers, he let her hands drop.

"There is nothing to forgive, Allison," he

said quietly. "I am more than satisfied if I have only partly reestablished myself in your opinion. I am the one who needs forgiveness, and who should offer thanks."

"But, Keith, you lost——"

She stopped in confusion when she saw that she had blundered.

"An eye," he finished quickly, "but I have gained so much more. Did you ever see my grandfather, Allison? He was a man, a real man, all man. I don't think I ever understood him, ever knew him, until now. But I'm going back to Chicago with a new idea of him, and a new idea of most everything else, and I'm going to try to be more like him, more of a—more of a man."

"Keith! You are! You are that now! We know you are!"

Verner glanced up gratefully.

"It means a lot when you and Roger think so," he said..

POINTS OF VIEW

By ED. L. CARSON

SAID THE POET

WHERE the mighty mountain masses with their deep dividing passes
 Keep their watch and ward above a waste of white;
 Where, like jewels, glaciers glisten and all Nature seems to listen
 In the silence of the steely arctic night;
 Where a dream of golden treasure adds its glamor to the pleasure
 Which you feel in waves across the senses go;
 'Mid such marvels of Creation one may know the fascination
 Of the Northern Lights a-gleam upon the snow.

SAID THE PROSPECTOR

WHEN the bacon's rather rusty and the flour is somewhat musty
 And you've kinda lost your appetite for beans;
 When the pay-streak is elusive and the luck is plumb abusive
 And there isn't any jingle in your jeans;
 With the hungry huskies howling and your partner glum and growling
 And the mercury some forty-odd below;
 When you're blue as thunderation then you miss the fascination
 Of the Northern Lights a-gleaming on the snow.



A HERO UNDER PRESSURE

By WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY

Author of "Hooty Goes East," "The World Next Door," etc.

THE two young men had waited an hour. The inattention was a positive discourtesy. Finally they were admitted to the little back office of the Vermont bank.

President Abijah D. Cadwell was sixty years tough, six feet tall and the three dimensions of him gristle. He had made a hundred thousand dollars hating the neighbors. When one hates his neighbors he can do many things toward his financial betterment which one can not do who does not harbor that animosity.

In the scrubby back office of the Burrington Bank he awaited his visitors, striding up and down the floor with his fists in the pockets on his stomach. He had a stubby, under-shot jaw, hard red nose and eyes close together. He ran the bank in the same battered green derby hat and frayed dusty clothes in which he ran his sawmill. Of his business ability it was said that Rufus J. Wallingford would get as near to him as the drug-store at the corner of Main and Pine Streets, where that financial genius of notoriety had his picture in the magazines.

The better-dressed, sharper-faced young fellow acted as spokesman. He acknowledged President Cadwell's curt nod with a pleasant good-morning.

"Mr. Cadwell," said he, "meet Mr. Buswick—Baldwin B. Buswick—of Nebraska."

The discourteous old New Englander said no word. He took the fists from his

paunch, slid them up his chest and fastened bony hooks of thumbs into the armpits of his vest. He gave a second curt nod.

"Ever since I have owned *The Times* here, Mr. Cadwell," went on the spokesman, "I have done what I could to boost Burrington and help along its struggling Board of Trade. I'm aware there's an element in this town which is resolutely against any one who does anything to better the community, because people with enterprise are dangerous; they are the 'smart Alecs' who try to run things. But I've ignored that characteristic New England way of looking upon enterprise, and when I was elected President of the Board of Trade I determined that my administration should be marked by the precedent of bringing to Burrington a new industry. I have had extensive correspondence with Mr. Buswick with this end in view."

"You mean this fellow wants to start a factory here?" snapped Abijah.

Young Swift flushed under the impoliteness in the reference to his companion, but preserved his equanimity.

"Mr. Buswick," he continued, "has invented a machine—an automatic, portable, deadly efficient saw which may be used by lumbermen for the cutting and scaling of trees. One lumber-jack, equipped with this saw can do the work of four workmen under the old hand system. He has refused to sell his patent. He wishes to make the

machine himself. But his former home in Nebraska offers no opportunity in the way of materials or markets. As this section of Vermont is handy to all of the great lumbering sections of the east, the Green Mountains, the Adirondacks, the soft timber of the Maine woods and the pulp areas of northern Michigan and eastern Canada, this would be an especially good location for him. There are three cities within a radius of a hundred miles which can supply him with all necessary raw materials and Burlington is an excellent shipping-point."

"I see," broke in Abijah. "You want me to subscribe to stock. Well, I won't do it!"

"On the contrary," replied young Swift smoothly, "I do not want you to subscribe to stock. This is not a promotion scheme. But as the most influential man in the community I would like you to help us get the rental of the old Hallett plant at a reasonable figure and after the business gets going aid the new firm with such accommodation as it may require if security warrants."

President Abijah Cadwell surveyed Baldwin B. Buswick critically. The young man had the shine of overpressing on his clothes, a grave worried face and dandruff on his collar. His age was twenty-eight, his nationality American, his temperament desperate. His general appearance implied a wife and three babies somewhere, with the rent due. The bank man slowly transferred his hard, round eyes to a plug of tobacco and cut himself a chew.

"How much money have you got, young man?" he demanded.

"I've got about twelve hundred dollars," responded the other grimly. "But I've got letters of introduction here that are gilt-edged." Baldwin Buswick brought from his breast-pocket a sheaf of papers.

"Don't want to see them!" snapped Abijah. "But if you want advice, here it is: Take your twelve hundred dollars and put it in this bank at three per cent. Get a job and go to work. To take your savings and attempt to go into business at your age—especially in Burlington, Vermont—is the sheerest nonsense!"

Anger flared in young Swift's face.

"This is no way to treat a man who wants to bring a business to our town!" he exclaimed passionately.

"Young man," retorted Abijah, "hold your tongue! Ever since you came to this town you've been preaching and attempt-

ing these new-fangled notions of making the place over or making it larger. This town has held its own since I was a boy and I guess it can go along for a few years more at the same pace. You seem to be the only one croaking over its condition and your Board-of-Trade scheme is something that wasn't called for and only a lot of smart little boys like yourself are supporting. When we think this town needs any industrial stimulus, I imagine there's several of us older people perfectly capable of bringing it in. We don't need to call on any boy just out of business college."

Abijah turned again to Buswick.

"Young man," said he, "to take twelve hundred dollars and send it forward in one boat on the perilous seas of business, means only utter loss and ruin. Ninety per cent. of all businesses fail. There is not a doubt but in six months you'll lose every dollar. You're too young to run a business, anyhow."

He dismissed both boys with a wave of his hard hand.

"No," he concluded, "I sha'n't be mixed up in no boys' scheme to start a factory on twelve hundred dollars. You'll have to get the endorsement of five people, all satisfactory to us, also, on your notes, before we can consider loaning you any money."



CRESTFALLEN and chagrined, the two young men went into the street. They crossed from the bank to the newspaper office. Young Swift lit a cigar morosely.

"There," said he, indicating the bank across the street, "you have a first-hand exhibition of what ails New England." He swore sourly. "Up in Burlington the Greater Vermont Association is sending out tons and tons of literature, hiring and routing speakers, and paying hard cash for space in newspapers and magazines, aiming to build up Vermont and keep Vermont boys at home. They're leaving the State by thousands every year, after every high-school and college commencement. Why? Because every community of this cut has its Abijah D. Cadwell and cronies. What good does the Greater Vermont Association do, so long as individual incentive is squelched by such talk as we've just heard?"

The young Westerner did not reply. Swift went on:

"The minute a native son reaches man's

estate and thinks he could set the world on fire if the neighbors would even hold the sandpaper while he scratched the matches, he goes to the leading men of the town and gets a line of talk such as we've just heard. What does he do? If there's any sand in him, he packs a Bible and a clean pair of socks in his suit-case and kites for the West where Abijah D. Cadwells are squashed with neatness and dispatch. It's a quicker and easier way to make fame and fortune than staying in New England and boosting old folks who do not want boosting."

Swift threw the half-smoked cigar into the cuspidor with another righteous oath.

"I'm so weary of boosting a community that takes it as insult, that if any one offered me fifty cents on the dollar for this paper, I'd shake Vermont's dust from my shoes so quick that a dump-cart couldn't clean the pile out of Main Street."

Baldwin B. Buswick's bull-dog jaws came together and his lips were muscular and determined.

"Swift," said he, "I don't pretend to understand it. I've known of men come West in a box-car that in five years were presidents of banks. That's the difference between the East and the West. If a man went West to start an industry, even if he dropped off a freight, there'd be a delegation of leading citizens to brush off his clothes, lend him a quarter for a shave and hair-cut and, if he stayed two days, introduce him to the best families. It's because the West believes in tomorrow, the East in yesterday. All my life I've been taught that failure is only to those who think failure. I'm a Westerner, grown up in that atmosphere. The fact that I'm now in the East shouldn't change me. Swift, I'll make you a proposition."

Buswick crossed to the editorial desk and banged a cordy little fist down upon it.

"I've a wife and three babies dependent on me. I've got twelve hundred dollars, every cent I have in the world. But I believe in myself and my invention. If you've had the sand to buy out this paper and boost your Board of Trade in a community which treats you this way, I've sand to start the Buswick Machine Company right here in Burrington and let the community go to the devil. And I'd like to have you in my company. I'll put in my money and invention. You put in what money you can raise and the influence of your paper

and we'll buck this moss-grown, yesterday-worshiping, ninety-per-cent.-of-all-businesses-fail element with a little Western pep and belief in tomorrow!"

"We'll need the dust almost as much as we need sand," replied Swift sadly. Then his jaw squared. "Buswick," said he, "you're the kind of chap Vermont needs, even if you're not a native. I'll go you!"

The two enterprising, nervy, fighting young men shook hands.

"Maybe it'll be a frightful handicap to have the local bank down on us," concluded Buswick. "But we'll scrap it out. The fellow who will never admit he is licked, never is licked."

So the Buswick Machine Company began its career in sleepy Burrington.

II



BURRINGTON, Vermont was a halted period in civilization, existing because three thousand people continued to make it their residence. The chief occupation of its inhabitants was minding one another's business. They did this cheerfully.

Like most New England towns, analysis would show that its society was divided sharply into two classes: those who were against a proposition for the reason that the other half the census stood for it.

Physically, the town covered three miles of streets without sidewalks, stores without courage and homes without paint. It had its quota of pansy-beds, ladies' aid societies, habitations smelling of cream at one end and musty best-parlors at the other, and town buildings so impressive their weight was painful.

There was a sawmill, the Cadwell plant, a cheese-factory and creamery, several sand and one national bank and a Main Street of stores whose windows shrieked for suds. Its younger set had made several modern attempts to change the question: "What Shall We Do To Be Saved?" into "What Shall We Do Tonight?" There was a public library, run by the raveled end of a had-been romance who had failed to catch a man, and patronized by the average citizen who cut his hair in the style of 1888 and compiled most of his conversation by constant reference to "the good old times."

As every similar New England town has its President Cadwell, so it has its William

Swift. He is very much a hustler, very much in earnest, very much possessed of the insane idea that towns the size of Burlington have as much chance for improvement, prosperity and business growth as the wildest boom-town of the West.

Those wise in the ways of New England, however, know this is the sheerest nonsense, that there is nothing like "the good old times" and they will never come again. For detail, any ill-shaven, frayed-coated, tobacco-spitting hotel loafer will gladly devote an evening to explain wherein the national administration is sharply to blame and why, another election, he intends to vote "ag'in' it!"

As every New England town has both its Cadwell and its Swift, so it has its quota of those who see nothing but rattle-headed immaturity in the policies of William Swift. Such men are dangerous to the community. They do things. New England, and especially Vermont, has not room for men who do things. They keep the community in a continual turmoil. They are undesirable citizens. Consequently, because they set themselves up to accomplish something, they are whipped with New England's displeasure.

"What the deuce are you advocating that for?" demands one Vermonter of another who wishes a public improvement. "Don't you know you'll make a nuisance of yourself?" So the East is East and West is West.



FOUR months later, in the dingy little office of the Buswick Machine Company, Baldwin Buswick raised his haggard face. For ten minutes he had been sitting before the battered desk, his perplexed forehead on his wrists.

"I suppose it's my fault," volunteered young Swift. He sprawled wryly in a chair a few feet away, his chin dug in his shirt-front. "I got you up here. I helped raise the money to get the Hallett plant for us to start in. Honestly, Baldwin, I'd get the money out for you if I could."

"Remember, it was my proposition that we buck old Cadwell," growled Buswick. "You're a good chap, Swift. You needn't take more blame on your shoulders than you deserve."

Buswick arose and crossed to the west window. The shade was up. He could see far down the moonlit valley.

The third occupant of the office was a woman. She was a wan, frail little body. Lines of care had furrowed her face. The eyes were large and pathetic, showing traces of tears.

"Baldwin," she whispered, "we can't give up, now. 'We've got to pull through, somehow!'"

Her husband was silent.

"It's a shame!" Swift burst out. "We've a good business, plenty of orders, all the materials we need, and we've got to close because Cadwell has blocked every effort of ours to get capital. That's the New England small-town way of doing business: Crucify the growth of the whole community simply because the advent of a few skilled workmen like we've employed compels him to pay his own men better wages."

"That was probably the reason back of his advice to me that morning in the bank," growled Buswick savagely.

"All we've got in the world is tied up in here," repeated the wistful little woman. "And Baldwin! We might let it all go. We might start over again back in the West where folks don't act so small as this. But there's Little Boy Blue's grave on the hill, Baldwin! We can't go away and leave that."

"No," retorted Swift savagely, "you can not!"

"What can we do?"

Swift arose. He crossed over and placed a strong hand on Buswick's shoulder.

"He thinks he's got us, Baldwin," said he, "by refusing to renew that note. I've put in all I've got. There's just one thing to save us. There's mother's insurance money, left her from father's death. Mother trusts my business judgment. She'll loan it to me. My business judgment tells me that it's a risk. But you've risked all you have. Now I'll risk my share. I'll get the money and pay the note."

"We won't have any capital by the end of the month," declared Baldwin. "Cadwell has queered us in the whole community. We've met with a fair measure of success. Because we have, he's determined to wreck us, simply because he can't bear to have his judgment turn out wrong. No, Bill, I can't see your mother lose what little money she has. We've got to find some other way, not alone to pay that note, but put us beyond the reach of Cadwell entirely."

Swift shook his head.

"We'll struggle up with this business in spite of Cadwell," he declared. "It's share and share alike. I'll have the money for the note in the morning."

III



THE pretty little wife of Baldwin B. Buswick waited in the parlor of the Whitney House with a pounding heart. One of the loafers on the steps outside had shouted: "Here he comes!" and the words had set every nerve in her breast throbbing tortuously with the import of the task she confronted.

The hoof-beats of a galloping saddle-horse tattooed faintly down the street. The sound grew louder and the faithful little woman's face grew whiter and her muscles weaker.

Finally a picture from Remington thundered into sight and pulled a cordy pony to an abrupt halt before the steps.

From the saddle slid an astounding man!

A great copper giant, he was, clothed in a knee-length coat, a gray-white sombrero of tremendous size, a soft shirt and flowing tie. Two hundred and fifty pounds he would weigh and his clothes fitted him with the ludicrous inference of an attempt to wrap an apple-tree in a pocket-handkerchief.

Such was the tremendous man from whom the loafers shrank in awe as he turned the horse over to a boy and mounted the steps.

Somehow the little wife staggered to her feet and moved from the parlor out into the hall. The Titanic man reared before her like the business-end of a battleship. She could not speak. She put out a hand to detain him.

"You're Mr. Malone—aren't you?" she finally lisped. "Could—could I see you alone for a moment?"

Despite his size, the big Montana cowman visiting in the East, pulled off his hat with a graceful bow.

"Madam," he boomed genially, "when it comes to givin' time to the ladies, I am a walkin' hour-glass in trousers. Command me!"

In twenty minutes the loafers had a terrific subject on which to base an evening's conversation. The preposterous Montana visitor had foregone his supper to stroll through the mystic Green Mountain after-

glow with the pretty, diminutive wife of Baldwin B. Buswick.

Hooty Malone, like young Lochinvar, had come out of the West.

Big-bodied, bronze-faced and dynamic was he—a machine-gun of a man with a heart as large as his Montana horizons. Ex-puncher, rancher, business giant and Friend of Man, he had screwed ninety-six thousand dollars from an obstreperous New York power corporation because the New York Power Corporation had neglected to remember that man was his brother's keeper. For a few days he still lingered in the East. This memorable day he had spent on his pony in the wild beauties of the Green Mountains.

Now, far out in the Summer night, Hooty Malone walked and listened to the little woman's story. Savagely he kicked stones from his pathway and rammed cant-hook thumbs into his sagging belt.

"The case is desperate, Mr. Malone," his companion declared. "A month ago Baldwin and Mr. Swift exported some machines abroad. It took a lot of money. And just when we needed it most, Mr. Cadwell called a note. Mr. Swift borrowed his mother's insurance money and put it in. Even that wasn't enough. For two weeks we have not been able to pay the men. We've been waiting for a big check from a New York exporting company who were to settle for the shipment abroad. It more than covers what we owe the men. But last week Mr. Cadwell talked to some of them and told them they better attach us because we were going into bankruptcy soon. And, Mr. Malone—I sold my diamond engagement ring for enough to stave the men off till the big check came. This noon it came."

The woman had to stop a moment to control her emotion. Hooty broke in—

"But if it came, why worry?"

"Because Mr. Cadwell has said Baldwin and Mr. Swift couldn't succeed in this community and, when there's a chance of winning out in spite of him, he's doing all he can to oppose us. You see, if we succeed and grow here, it will mean there'll be some other powerful employers to oppose him in the community. Then, we pay our men more than he and soon his men are going to be dissatisfied.

"Taken all together, he is doing his utmost to get us out. He knew the state our men were in and how much trouble it will

mean if they are not paid in full tomorrow night. So, when the big check came today, he refused to cash it. He said he'd enter it for collection. That means we can't have the money on it for three days more. Then, too, we need that money for other things. Whenever a request for a report on our credit comes in at his bank, he sends one back as black as night. Consequently we can't get credit anywhere. All our materials have to come cash on delivery."

"The confounded, dirt-eatin' skunk!" ejaculated Hooty.

"I know we're strangers to you," went on Mrs. Buswick. "But I heard that you'd made a lot of money out of a New York Power Company and that you came from the West like ourselves. I've come to you without Baldwin or Mr. Swift knowing, because I'm desperate. Because we're all Western folks together, and you know how Western folks help each other, I didn't know but what you'd tell Baldwin what to do to win!"

The little lady was now weeping openly. Reaching the end of her narrative and feeling the pitiful weakness of her appeal, the nervous reaction began.

"How much was the check?" Hooty demanded.

"Sixteen hundred dollars. And I'm afraid Baldwin is going insane with the worry of how he's to pull through. He's worked so hard to get things started! So much is at stake!"

"Why won't Cadwell loan him money on straight business accommodation?" demanded Hooty angrily. "If a bank ain't to help home folks get into business, what in Tophet is it for?"

"That's what Mr. Swift and Baldwin say. Mr. Cadwell told Baldwin once that if his bank had any surplus to invest, it was going into Western farm mortgages. He said his bank wasn't a charitable institution to help every fool who might try to make money with a factory in New England."

"Western mortgages!" drawled the puncher. He rubbed his big chin. "Yaas! The money comes out West where we take chances, havin' no Cadwells round to wet-blanket us. We dare and we win. Then we send the dividends back to Vermont. We're *safe* investments because the East don't see the chances we take. And we make the dividends because out in the land

o' foothill and sky, there's no such word as fail. Can you beat it?"

"Mr. Malone, so much is at stake! Every cent we've got has gone into this fight, even—my only, only diamond ring. Help us, Mr. Malone, please do! I don't know enough about business to explain how you could get anything out of it. I'm just appealing to you because you're Western, like ourselves and the motto of the West is 'Help One Another.'"

Baldwin Buswick's little wife was very eloquent in her tears. Also, the big Westerner's cosmos never could stand the sight of a pretty woman in trouble. He pulled his big nose again and tried to swallow a throaty substance without success.

"Baldwin Buswick may have put all his money into his business, ma'am," said he, "but there's one asset he ain't lost yet and that's his wife! Pardonin' the simile and metaphor, ma'am, but any man as would ponder over goin' insane with you for a pard, is—is a bloomin' jackass, ma'am!"

"And you'll help us?"

"It is my firm and uncontaminated belief, ma'am, that Abijah D. Cadwell can be skun so clean o' his thumb-nail principles that all he'll have left from the scrap is the memory o' his telephone number, ma'am!"

IV



"WHAT'S it your business?" demanded Abijah when the big cowman seemed to cramp his whole office the next morning.

"Because I've made it my business. I'm Hooty Malone from Montana and I'm the Spirit Incarnate o' Helpin' the Neighbors. From it I get pleasure, money, friendship, salvation and the thanks o' women folks. It beats mortgage - foreclosin' all hollow! Now this hard-workin' little pair have taken me through their factory and shown me their books and their prospects. They've got bowels, these boys! But they've been mistreated. Because of a good little woman, a little grave on a hill-top, and the meanness o' the guidin' spirits o' this community—so mean and low-down they'd have to jump upward to touch the bottom o' Hades—I've got into this scrap with both feet and a check-book."

"You can't borrow money here."

"Yes, I'm goin' to borrow money here!"

You-all ain't fiddlin' 'round with two desperate boys when you fiddle with me. I want twenty thousand dollars to put this business on its feet."

Abijah D. Cadwell turned a beautiful pea-green.

"Twenty thousand dol——"

He could not finish the sentence in astonishment at the very absurdity of it.

"You rattle-headed Western fool!" he retorted. "Don't you know the banking laws of this state don't allow a bank to invest in anything but first mortgages on land, unless there's five endorsers on a note of men that own enough real estate to cover? Besides, we wouldn't loan that much to one concern!"

Hooty permitted himself a sizzling comment.

"Yaas," he concluded, "that's another — fool law that keeps live business men out o' your state. Who's goin' to start a business in a state where it's necessary to show the entrails o' your business to every prospective endorser—and even then not always get 'em?"

"We've got the most money in our vaults of any state, per capita, in the union!" retorted Abijah.

"Anybody'd think," Hooty retorted, "it was somethin' to be proud of. In the West, a dollar lyin' idle in a bank-vault is a crime against the neighbors."

"You can't have any money here for that concern," retorted Abijah. "You might as well ask the battle monument at Bennington for twenty thousand dollars, unless you've got security so gilt-edged you could clip the gold off it and use that instead."

"Oh, I didn't expect you'd hand it out to me pleasantly," purred Hooty. "I just come to notify you that I wanted it and before I get through, this business is goin' to get it—and from this bank!"

"Then you're wastin' your time. I been running this bank for twenty years and I ain't crazy and don't drink."

Hooty reached for a pen and scribbled the endorsement on a check.

"Will you accept that deposit?" he asked.

Abijah looked at the check. It was certified and called for the payment to "Self" of twenty thousand dollars.

"Where — where'd you get so much money?" the old man gasped.

"Never mind," Hooty returned. "You

put that to credit o' the Buswick Machine Company."

"What have you got in return for it?" Abijah demanded. "Man, don't you know this bally little company ain't a safe business proposition?"

"Three Westerners is runnin' the Buswick Company," Hooty retorted. "And when three Westerners is behind a business you can jus' hitch your little red wagon to it because there ain't no such word to a Westerner as *fail*."

For a moment Abijah wanted to refuse the money. But an account of twenty thousand dollars was too much. However, he ordered old Amos Fish to open the account without a thank-you to the picturesque depositor.

"Are you aimin' to finance this company?" Abijah demanded.

"No," said Hooty, "jus' aimin' to make you progress in spite of yourself!"

Leaving Abijah with a feeling of uneasiness, Hooty went into the square and took the long sandy street that led to the machine works.

In the office he met the two young men.

"Did he bite?" repeated Hooty. "I should say he did! Swallowed hook, line, fish-pole and fisherman. All he left was the fisherman's rubber-boots upright on the bank. But then, what chance had he got to do otherwise? Western brains can trim a business man like him till his soul has to go sneakin' through the back lanes o' the community in a barrel for want o' a body to hide its nakedness."

V



IMMEDIATELY things began to happen at the plant of the Buswick Machine Company.

A week later Abijah met two strange young men in the post-office. He followed them into Palmerton's drug-store.

"Just come to town?" he asked. "Seems I've seen your faces somewhere before."

"I should say you had," one of them rejoined. "We used to live here. I'm Don Kingley who tried to run Pop's machine-shop till you stopped loaning me accommodation."

"What you aimin' to do back here, now?"

"Been running a business down in Springfield. Got a letter the other day from this

Buswick making me an offer to return and take charge of their jigs. It was too good to pass up."

Abijah crossed over and entered the barber shop.

Sammy Dunne, new bookkeeper at the Buswick plant, was being lathered and talking, between rubs, to a group of waiters in the chairs.

"Swift is tryin' to find out the location of every man and boy who ever left town because Cadwell and his bunch hogged everything. The company's goin' to pay the expenses of gettin' back all the native sons they can reach. This is goin' to be strictly a Vermont industry where Vermont boys are given as much chance as they'd have anywhere else."

The deathly quiet which succeeded told Sammy that something was wrong and he squirmed around to find that Abijah had been listening. The old bank-man said nothing, however. He returned to the bank.

One week later, when Barney Chandler, a man of his own type, was viewing with alarm the size of the growing bank-account of the new company, Abijah turned to him and said in the matter-of-fact tone with which such men would announce the fatal approach of a planet:

"Something's going to happen to us pretty soon, Barney. You know how many voters there are in village meetin' we can count on?"

"There's a hundred and ninety-three in the corporation," returned the big-wristed old farmer.

"Half of that, Barney, is ninety-six. There's nearly a hundred voters been put on in this Buswick plant already. There's a good half-dozen a week being brought back to Vermont the same as Don Kingley. Do you suppose one of those men will vote any other way than this big chunk of red meat wants 'em?"

"What's goin' to be the result?" Chandler demanded.

"We're goin' to be voted out of house, home and office. Don't you know what it means if young fellers like Swift and Buswick is voted into town offices in our places?"

"Ruin!" replied Chandler.

"Rattle-brained schemes for boosting the town that they call Progress!"

"Which is worse!" gasped Chandler.

VI



THE first surprise of what was in store for Burrington, and particularly A. D. Cadwell, came on the day that the big addition to the Buswick Machine Company's factory was completed.

Abijah was promenading the tiny back office when the boy of all work in the bank ushered in Baldwin Buswick's wife.

There were tears in the eyes of Mrs. Buswick. For a few moments she stood awkwardly by the long directors' table fingering a tiny box and a letter. Finally her eyes slowly raised to meet those of the old man. She swallowed twice. Then—

"Mr. Cadwell," she said hesitatingly, "I have come—to you—to apologize to you. I don't know how to say what I ought, Mr. Cadwell. I misjudged you so! I felt that my personal thanks ought to be brought you instead of mailing you a letter."

"Letter?" exclaimed Abijah. "By the Great Horn Spoon! What are you talking about?"

"Why! My diamond ring."

"Your diamond ring? What about your diamond ring?"

"I felt I ought to tender you my thanks for your great kindness. Oh, Mr. Cadwell, I thought all along that you were hard and cruel and doing your best to make Baldwin fail——"

The tears sprang to the little lady's eyes and she was obliged to pause a moment to regain her self-control.

"Great gods of Ancient Rome!" roared Abijah. "Woman, what are you talking about?"

"Why, your great kindness in returning me my ring. I had no idea, Mr. Cadwell, that it was yourself that indirectly bought it so Baldwin could have the money to keep running and that you intended all along to return it!"

Abijah gulped several times.

"Woman," he retorted, "you're stark, raving crazy."

"Oh, you needn't hide your kindness behind such gruff words, Mr. Cadwell. I've heard of men of your make-up before—who did kind deeds and then hid them under a cloak of bogus brutality."

Abijah stared at the woman. Plainly there was no acting to her emotion or her words. In her hand she held a sheet of plain note-paper. Seeking explanation, the

bank man took it roughly from her hand. He read:

DEAR MRS. BUSWICK:

Permit me to return to you a bit of property which I understand you sacrificed when your husband's business was supposedly in danger a few months ago.

It was not possible for me to loan your husband money at that time without incurring the animosity of other borrowers, equally deserving. So I had to take the course which I did.

I had heard you state that you would forfeit your treasure as a last resort and I determined that it should at least fall into hands which would return it to you, in case your plucky husband lost. As help came from an unexpected quarter before I could adopt some other blind expedient to aid Mr. Buswick, I now take pleasure in returning the jewel. Your husband's account is now so valuable to our institution that I shall cancel the debt and apply it to the cost of getting new business.

Very respectfully,
A. D. C.

Abijah stared at his initials, astounded. Several times he opened his mouth to say something and shut it as quickly. Plainly some one had done a kind action and charged it to his account. This was the first intimation he had that Mrs. Buswick had ever made such a sacrifice.

"That's all right," he told her gruffly.

He said it to get rid of her and do some thinking. He totally forgot that the words were an acknowledgment of the act.

The woman left. That evening, however, when the *Times* appeared, the old bank man staggered back to his office as if a blow had been belted him between the eyes. The front page contained an editorial by William Swift and squarely in the center was a zinc-etching reproduction of the letter Mrs. Buswick had brought to the bank.

PRESIDENT CADWELL GROSSLY MISJUDGED

**When Buswick Machine Works
Was Struggling for Funds,
Local Bank Man Bought Dia-
mond Ring of Proprietor's
Wife to Supply Funds
Where He Could Not
Loan**

For a column and a half, with his face changing color, Abijah D. Cadwell read a glowing account of a charity with which he had never had anything to do.

During the succeeding hour, Abijah sat in the back office of the bank doing some dynamic thinking. Then he went home by the shortest route and by a way which would avoid meeting any neighbors.

Abijah kept much to himself during the next twenty-four hours. He was in the sawmill office when his bookkeeper brought in the next issue of *The Evening Times*.

This was the article which shrieked at him from the headlines:

DIAMOND-RING EPISODE BRINGS STARTLING DIS- CLOSURES

**Credit For Location of Big Bus-
wick Industry Here Belongs
to Local Bank President**

**A. D. CADWELL MADE \$20,000 POS-
SIBLE**

**Sudden Industrial and Real-Estate Boom
Caused by Aid of Local Financier's
Generosity**

For two columns of ten-point type, the grizzled old man, whose life had been a long series of pettifoggery and selfishness, read himself as a benefactor of the community, the chief factor in its sudden prosperity and its first citizen.

"By all the sore-toed prophets and little oysters at a church supper!" he swore.

Then he said nothing for twenty - nine minutes.

Folding the paper carefully, he locked the door of his office and took his way to the Whitney House. Jimmy Barron, the clerk, said Hooty Malone was in his room. Up went Abijah and entered the room without knocking.

Hooty Malone's feet were cocked on the center-table. His gray-white sombrero was hung over the toe of one boot. His coat-tails flopped on the floor. Sitting nearly on the back of his neck, the big Westerner had the paper spread over his knees and was chuckling at the same article.

"What's the idea?" demanded Abijah.

Hooty kicked the hat across the room, came into position and swung round a chair for his visitor.

"— the chair!" bellowed Abijah. "Who's responsible for that article in to-night's paper?"

"Why!" Hooty exclaimed. "You are!"

"I am not! I didn't give a dollar to the Buswick Machine Company. I opposed it from the start and you know it. This is conspiracy! What's your game?"

"Hoity-toity!" whistled the puncher. "Such modesty! Such self-effacement!"

"I had nothing to do with it, I tell you! This article is a preposterous fraud. That diamond-ring nonsense was the limit. This is beyond the limit!"

"What are you comin' to me about it for?"

"You're responsible for it!"

"You can't prove it!"

"And you can't prove I made \$20,000 possible for this company to get started." Abijah nearly swallowed his quid in his wrath. "You deposited that cash and you know it!"

"Oh, no. I merely loaned the Buswick Company \$20,000 for thirty days. If you'll look at your books you'll see that the company made me out a check for the amount with interest thirty days later."

"Yes, but you put another \$20,000 in right on top of it. You've been putting in money right along. There's almost \$30,000 of capital in the bank right now. I haven't had a thing to do with it. I'm going to issue a statement to that effect. If the paper won't print it, I shall sue for damages."

"How have you been damaged?"

"This—this is all a—lie!" gasped Abijah. Hooty contorted in glee.

"Here's a man goin' to bring suit against a newspaper for callin' him a public benefactor and first citizen o' the place. Ha! Ha! Ha! All right then, we'll have the paper take it back. We'll have 'em say you ain't no public benefactor. You ain't the first citizen o' the place. Then I suppose you'll sue Swift for libel. If you ain't one or the other, then what the Sam-Hill are you?"

Abijah was stumped. Then it dawned upon him what a tremendous ass he would make of himself if he ever said a word in contradiction.

Chagrined, he headed for the door. From there he shook his fist at Hooty.

"Keep it up!" said he. "Do your worst. I don't know your game, but you're treading on dangerous ground. The first thing I

can find that'll get the law on you, you get it—to the limit!"

"Good night, First Citizen," called Hooty.



ABIJAH left the hotel with the veins in his neck throbbing in ugly purple.

Straight back to his house he went and was surprised to find the lamp lighted in his musty parlor. Through the blind he saw several people in his front room.

He went in, his face set hard, ready to face new surprises.

He found there the pastors of the three churches, the assessors and seven young men who had lately returned to Vermont from fields afar.

"We feel, Mr. Cadwell," began the Rev. Johnathan Ruggles, "that this newly formed Village Improvement Society owes you a vote of thanks for your generous donation toward our work which was received last evening. We felt it was especially opportune to step over and thank you this evening on top of the disclosures which have appeared in tonight's *Times*."

"We have wondered for some time exactly who has been behind this sudden stimulus to our beautiful little village and especially the big business which is growing here. The article in tonight's paper makes it all clear. Of course we could not enter wholly into the endorsement of the Board of Trade and the *Times*' editorial policy while it was conducted solely by young Swift. But when such men as yourself fall into the work of uplifting the community in such a wholehearted manner, we feel obliged and gratified to enroll under your banner, for we know that the work will go forward in a thorough and businesslike way. Now as to this little gift of a thousand dollars——"

"A thousand dollars!" gasped Abijah. "I haven't given anybody a thousand dollars—unless I did it asleep or drunk!"

"Tut! Tut! Mr. Cadwell, there is no need for subterfuge nor the hiding of your light under a bushel. We have your letter and that is sufficient."

"If some one is signing my name to correspondence they'll go to State's prison for it!" retorted Abijah.

"We appreciate you are a modest man," rejoined the spokesman, and added: "Your initials were quite sufficient."

"But there might be some one else with my initials. A. D. C. might not necessarily mean myself."

"Yes, yes," beamed the minister diplomatically, "but of course there is no other person in the community able to make such a princely gift. If the subject is painful to you, we will make our visit and our thanks short. But we wished you to know that we are not unmindful of the manner in which you have made it possible for us to carry on our work of putting a new appearance on the village."

"Also, we appreciate the return of so many native sons to their home town. The Greater Vermont Association could talk itself deaf, dumb and blind, but a few thousand dollars given as you have given it accomplishes more in a matter of months than talk accomplishes in years. This is no disparagement to their work, of course, as their finances are limited."

"All right," said Abijah grimly, "take the money and blow it. Get out and never thank me again for nothing!"

When they had gone Abijah sank bewilderedly into a chair.

"I'm being carried forward so fast, I'm smothering!" he groaned.



THERE was one other straw to be added, however.

Another month flew swiftly past and the Buswick Machine Company's plant continued to draw native boys back to Vermont. A queer atmosphere of prosperity, hustle, confidence in tomorrow, in Burrington, in Vermont, permeated the town.

The trustees voted several miles of new streets for the coming Spring. The improvement society laid walks. Other industries, attracted by the remarkable growth of the place, began to hold correspondence with young Swift with a view toward settling in the town. New stores were opened along Main Street to accommodate the constantly increasing number of new families moving into the place.

And amid it all, Abijah walked in a sort of daze. He had contradicted nothing and, the longer his silence, the more grew the belief in the minds of old-time citizens and newcomers alike that he was responsible for the town's sudden boom. Also Abijah was uneasy, for he knew the credit was not his own; and each morning he awoke wondering if the bubble of his popularity was to

be punctured by that damnable Westerner before night.

It was presidential election year and the Chief Executive was running for reelection. His itinerary included Vermont and young William Swift lost no opportunity to see that Burrington was on the line taken by his private car.

A week before the annual village meeting, also, young Swift received word that because of the large turnout to the annual village meeting—for the annual village meeting is a greater feature in many Vermont towns at present than the annual town meeting in March—the President would arrange to be in Burrington for that day when he could meet the largest number of voters.

With a mind torn by anxiety, feeling himself absolutely helpless in the velvet clutches of the huge Westerner, Abijah waited for what disclosures the day might bring. Would Hooty arise in the meeting and expose him? Was he to be ousted from the position as moderator of that eventful procedure which he had occupied without challenge so many years?

The old man was weak and ill as the day dawned and he was told that he was expected to preside as at former sessions.

VII



THE day of the village meeting dawned cold and raw. A cold October rain drove through the place and the crowd which early filled the streets was heavily bundled in extra clothing.

The Buswick Machine Works closed down for the day and with palpitating heart Abijah learned that Hooty's men were to be present in the meeting. They had lived in the place three months and were consequently eligible to vote.

Because of the added attraction of the President, the streets of Burrington were thronged with people as ten o'clock drew near. The cold, driving rain pelted down and even when the whistle of the Chief Executive's special was heard in the valley below there was doubt whether the President would speak long or at all in such inclement weather.

It was young Swift's suggestion that the big county court-room be thrown open, that the village meeting be held there and that

from its rostrum, instead of his observation platform, the President should speak.

It was barely a few moments before the Executive's train pulled in that young Swift loosed a special edition of the *Times* upon the streets. It seemed a strange spectacle in the little town that had been peacefully asleep in the land-locked mountain valley but a year before, for thirty newsboys to be ferreting through the crowd with a newspaper "Uxtra!"

In the back room of the bank Abijah sat, mopping his brow profusely.

"Amos," he said to the old cashier, "I'd give half my stock in this bank if I'd done all the *Times* has given me credit for doing. Because something tells me that before the hour is up I'm going to be sick, Amos—blankity-blank sick—and there ain't no doctor's pills going to be powerful enough to cure me!"

The boy of all work entered the back room without knocking.

"Barney Chandler said for me to bring you this quick," the boy declared.

It was an issue of the *Times*, damp from the press. With palsied hand Abijah spread it open.

THE MAN WHO MADE POSSIBLE THE BURRINGTON OF TODAY

Abijah D. Cadwell, the First Citizen of the Community, Who Will Receive the President

These were the headlines!

Underneath was a huge cut of the old bank man. With eyes which were glassy he read down the page his biography, the sudden change of heart he had experienced a year ago, his benefactions to the community. Nowhere appeared the names of Hooty Malone, William Swift or Baldwin B. Buswick.

"What can it mean?" over and over Abijah whispered. Then he threw down the paper and jammed down his hat.

"Lemme out into the air!" he roared. "It's a sure thing they can't expose me in village meeting after their own paper has given me the boost like this."



THE great man arrived.

Leading citizens, headed by the dazed Abijah, escorted him amid lines of cheering Burringtonians to the court-house half a block from the station. The crowd indoors was so great they could hardly press through. In all his sixty years Abijah had never seen such an awakening of the town, and deep in his tough old heart suddenly broke an exhilaration.

His own name was being cheered along with the President's!

Suddenly Abijah found himself out on the altar-like rostrum facing a sea of ruddy, rain-splashed faces. At his shoulder he saw the greatest man in the United States, followed by the secret-service men and the newspaper boys. At the other shoulder he saw young William Swift.

"Boy," gasped Abijah to the young man, the first kindly feeling in his voice which Swift had ever heard, "I can't moderate this meeting. For Heaven's sake—take my place!"

Not an eyelash did the young man flicker. He was the right man for the right place, was young Swift. With uplifted hand he stepped to the rail of the judge's bench and vainly begged for quiet.

Several minutes elapsed before the ovation ceased. What young Swift said the old man could not understand for the blood in his head was racing and would not let him hear.

But in a minute which seemed an eternity, the old man sensed that the President was speaking.

"Probably no town in New England," the great man was saying, "has seen such a phenomenal growth in so short a time as I see your beautiful Green Mountain town of Burrington has apparently enjoyed. I see by your newspaper, a copy of which was handed me down the valley an hour ago, that this remarkable change was brought about by one of your number that at the eleventh hour of his life has used his wealth and the influence of the banking institution which he heads to make it almost the leading place of its size for civic improvement and community progress of any town in the land of the Green Mountains.

"This, my fellow-citizens, is the true Vermont spirit. Vermont, first for freedom from New York back in the days of the Green Mountain Boys, stanch in the support of the Colonists during the Revolution,

bloody with one of the crucial battles of that great conflict, is awaking to the spirit of progress which hitherto has been characteristic largely of the enterprising West.

"Your honored fellow townsman, Abijah D. Cadwell, has established a precedent which I hope other stern and sturdy old Vermonsters will adopt—the rejuvenation of this great and grand old State, the peopling of its towns with the native sons who have gone forth to enrich the communities of distant lands, the placing of its natural resources and opportunities beside our other commonwealths of Americanism and an awakening of its landlocked cities and towns to the tremendous opportunities of the present century which are knocking at its doors. May he live long to enjoy the fruits of the labor he has so generously contributed."

The President's initiatory tribute to the town and State was lost in a maelstrom of cheering.

Great dank drops of sweat forced themselves out of Abijah's forehead and down his face. He would have sold his soul for a draft of the water a few feet away on the railing. But he lacked the strength to even raise his head. He knew that if he encountered the dark piercing eye of the Westerner in the crowd, he would pitch forward in a faint.

The President talked for a half-hour—that seemed four minutes—and resumed his place in a pandemonium of cheering.

Vainly young Swift pounded for order.

Finally Abijah realized that some one had risen in the crowd below and was attempting to get the chairman's attention.

There was no mistaking the great hulk, the copper skin, the coat that fitted like an apple-tree wrapped in a cotton handkerchief.

With chalk-white face, paralyzed in every muscle, his very heart-action suspended, Abijah awaited the exposé.

"I move, Mr. Chairman," thundered the Titanic voice of the Westerner, "that in view of the splendid tribute given our first citizen by our Chief Executive who is our honored guest this morning, this meeting publicly endorse the good work which Mr. Cadwell's money and institution has done in this community and that our resolution shall be so recorded on the minutes of the meeting shortly to convene. Further, I call for three rousing cheers for our next President and two more for the Hon. A. D. Cad-

well, first mayor of the forthcoming city of Burrington!"

The cheers were given and Abijah breathed again as Hooty sat down. But his heart jumped back in his throat for sudden terrible cries of "Speech! Speech!" filled the great room.

"Get up!" prodded young Swift. "Say something! Thank 'em at any rate!"

"I can't!" groaned old Abijah. "I don't deserve it. I never did a doggone thing to deserve it in all my born days."

A wild idea flashed through his mind to deny the whole thing then and there. Came the sickening thought that no one would believe him.

Then as in a dream he felt himself grasping the rail for support and facing that horrible roomful of people. He was filling the spot occupied the moment before by the First Citizen of the Land—and speaking a lie! And the First Citizen of the Land was listening to the lie!

As he opened his mouth, the penitent, broken old man commanded instant attention and quiet.

"Neighbors," he said thickly, "I wished to God I'd really done all I been given credit for doing. You won't believe me—but I ain't. Them two boys, Swift and Buswick, started all this commotion in Burrington and if there's any credit it belongs to them and that big red feller that just riz up over thar. I'm just a plain citizen like yourselves but I ain't wishin' I hadn't done something like this you're givin' me credit for."

The crowd cheered wilder. The President smiled.

"Mr. Cadwell," the President was saying as he wrung the old man's hand, "your self-effacement is commendable. But then, that is one of the admirable characteristics of the native Vermonter!"

VIII



THAT same evening, after Abijah D. Cadwell had been reelected to the office he had held for so many years, he sat with a queer mixture of feeling in his little back office while the soggy rain tapped, tapped, tapped against the glass. He was waiting for Hooty Malone and the two boy officers of the Buswick Machine Company.

After a while they arrived. They found

a man who had aged ten years in a day. "I don't know why you've done this," began Abijah aimlessly when the door had been closed.

"Because I told you I was goin' to make you progress in spite o' yourself!" declared Hooty. "But we ain't here to hold any mutual congratulation parties. Mr. Cadwell, I've fooled round here long enough. It's almost a year ago that I got through with the International Power Corporation and promised a little Montana girl I'd come right home to the Halter o' Hymen. Now I want to go before I get in deeper. Will you buy my stock in the Buswick Machine Company? It ain't a controllin' interest—the boys have got that—but if you buy this stock o' mine for twenty thousand dollars, I'll clear out and not bother you no more. Buy it and I'll call it fair remuneration for not givin' you away this mornin'."

Abijah looked Hooty squarely in the eye.

"Yes," said he, "I heard you wanted to sell to me. I've made up my mind to buy. But look here! Do you give me your word as a Westerner that this stock is all right; that this company is sound; that you ain't unloading from a losing proposition?"

"I do," declared Hooty. "We've brought the books to prove it."

Then Abijah Cadwell did a reckless thing. He said:

"You ain't got to prove it, Mr. Malone. Your word as a Westerner is good enough."

At noon next day Amos Fish came into the bank with a queer expression on his face.

"Well," demanded Abijah, "what's the matter? You look like an accident tryin' to find some one to happen to! Out with it!"

"I been up and looked over their books——"

"Yes! There's nothing wrong?"

"The company's sound as a nut—from all I can see. All the same——"

"For Heaven's sake! What's the matter?"

"You—lied—in front of the President."

"What!"

"You lied in front of all that roomful. You said you never had nothing to do with Burrington's prosperity."

"I didn't!"

"You did!" Amos laid down the armful of books he carried, opened one of the covers and took out a thick bunch of letters. "That big Westerner that left for Montana this morning took your money for twenty thousand dollars' worth of stock in the machine company, didn't he?"

"Yes," assented Abijah growing white. "He didn't cheat me, did he?"

"No," replied Amos, "not if you don't call selling stock for cash that was issued to you for services, cheating. But I been going through his desk. I found all these letters. I didn't know but what he's left 'em there on purpose. But you know that Western loans has always been your favorite form of investment."

"Yes."

"And we been taking several big mortgages lately with the firm of Cole & Richardson, brokers, of Sago City, Montana."

"Yes, what of it? The Sago City National Bank reported that the loans was O. K."

"Possibly. But that cute puncher went to work and organized the firm of Cole & Richardson almost the day that he loaned the Buswick Company \$20,000. He owns controlling stock in that company this very minute. You been sending money West to invest to spite him, and it was loaned on ranch and farm lands around Sago City. But instead of investing it in ranch and farm improvements, that Westerner's been getting his friends out there to use the money to buy stock in the Buswick Company. The money simply went West and came immediately back East and every dollar that's been developing the Buswick Machine Company and the town of Burrington has been cash that originated in the Burrington National Bank!"

"Amos," said Abijah after the denouement had soaked in, "take my place in the bank today. I'm going home and get in bed. Amos, I'm sick! Oh, Lord, how sick I am!"



The BROTHERS

by JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Author of "The White Queen of Sandakan," "The Soul of King Throsh."

THE two brothers, Sam and Dave Deschard, reached Ecuarbo Camp seven days after One-Eye Herrick had staggered in from the White Desert. Herrick brought a handful of glistening nuggets and a story more wonderful than any story of treasure that has ever been written. He had, far out in the heart of the White Desert, discovered a ledge upon which lay nuggets of pure gold, and he babbled of the sight as he lay fever-racked and delirious in the shack of Timmins, the storekeeper.

At moments Herrick became conscious and then he repeated over and over to himself the directions that would have to be followed by any one attempting to reach the ledge. He would not mutter the instructions while any one was in the room, but the moment the inquisitive ones of Ecuarbo went from his presence, he would repeat the words as if afraid that he might forget the way if he did not chant the directions over to himself.

Herrick forgot that the tough crowd in Ecuarbo would not be particular regarding the manner in which they obtained his information as long as they obtained it. Men listened for hours outside the thin, match-board walls of Timmins's store and when they had gathered up what they thought sufficient details of the route they set off, one by one, into the White Desert which had sent Herrick back with a handful of gold so that he might lure more fools out to

battle with the sand djinns that rode on the hot blasts that blew over the wastes.

Twenty men had left Ecuarbo during those seven days, and nine of the twenty had been beaten back and were now waiting anxiously the arrival of the mules and the two motor-cars which were expected from Belahua. The camp, excitement-crazed and rumor-maddened, speculated about the fate of the eleven who had plunged blindly into the sun-bitten stretches that barred them from Herrick's treasure-house.

On the seventh day came the Deschards, famous along the border as the possessors of great powers of endurance. They knew Herrick of old. To the brothers, the fever-wasted man told the directions, the directions to which half the camp had listened when he recited them to himself, and the Deschards listened with quiet, set faces. They examined the nuggets, hearkened to the stories which the nine defeated ones told of the dangers of the wastes, then, when they had thoroughly digested the gossip, they looked at each other inquiringly.

"What d'ye say, Sam?" asked Dave, the younger.

"Why, we'll go," said Sam.

"When?"

"Whenever you like."

"Tonight?"

"Uh, huh."

"Come on. We'll get ready."

And inside an hour Ecuarbo, waiting for

the mules and the automobiles, turned out to see Dave and Sam Deschard tramp off into the White Desert.



THE White Desert was waiting for the Deschards. It had a "No Trespass" sign writ large on the hot sands. It lay, a vicious, reptilian thing, waiting for those who were insane enough to venture out upon its heat-whitened sands.

The Deschards were big men, strong men. Both stood over six feet in height, both were perfect physical specimens. And they had confidence. If Herrick could reach the ledge of fabulous wealth, they also could reach it. The Deschards had never met a man who could stand more physical hardship than they could, and they had no doubt about the success of their attempt as they set out from Ecuarbo. They had looked over the nine who had been defeated, and they understood why they had come back like whipped hounds out of the wastes.

"Not a tough man amongst them," said Dave, after the nine had been reviewed.

"Tough?" muttered Sam. "Why, that bunch haven't got enough endurance to turn a hand-organ."

"What do you think about the eleven others?"

"They might get there. Peggin' out their claims now, maybe. Anyhow, counting Herrick's claim, there'll only be a dozen in front of us. We'll be thirteen."

"Thirteen!" muttered Dave. "Never mind, we'll do it."

On the third day out from Ecuarbo, the Deschards found one of the eleven. The sand djinns who galloped over the wastes had stamped him flat. The two brothers examined the gold seeker carefully, noted the condition of his water-bag and read the few words he had scratched with his jack-knife upon his tin cup. The inscription ran:

Got off the track. Tell my wife, 47 South Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. My name is Jack Ferguson.

"Poor devil," said Dave. "Write her name down, Sam. When we get back we'll drop her a line."

A puff of hot wind, as if annoyed by the remark, gathered up some sand and flung it in the face of Dave Deschard, and Dave cursed softly. The desert was fighting them as it had fought Jack Ferguson, but they were better fighters than Ferguson. The

two brothers had sized up the dead man's physique as they had sized up the strength of the nine who had returned beaten to Ecuarbo.

"Easterner," said Sam, breaking the hour's silence that followed the discovery of the dead man. "Plumb crazy for him to go out into this stuff."

"Uh, huh," murmured Dave.

"Gold gets 'em," said Sam.

"Uh, huh."

Dave was saving of breath. He had unlimited confidence in his strength, but nothing was to be gained by taking chances.

The sun on the hot desert licked at the faces and hands of the travelers with a million little tongues of flame, the blasts that gathered up the hot sand and flung it in their eyes had a ferocity that would have been terrifying to less experienced men.

On the fourth day they came across two more of the eleven who had not returned to Ecuarbo. The two were lying side by side. Big men they were, but the White Desert had won the bout. They had left no message.

"Three from eleven leaves eight," said Dave as the two brothers marched on. "Counting Herrick's claim, we'll be number ten if the others all got there."

"If," grunted Sam, and he hit viciously at an ugly-looking short-tailed lizard that had been disturbed by their approach.

"You don't think they did it?" said Dave.

"No. Save your breath, boy. Talking costs water."

On the morning of the fifth day the Deschards saw a fluttering cloth out on the waste where the hot winds were playing with something, but they kept steadily ahead. Dave subtracted one from ten; Sam was thinking over Herrick's description of the ledge.

On that day, the fifth, the White Desert fought the Deschards fiercely. It rose up and fell upon them. Mad, fiendish winds tore up the molten sands and bombarded them till they staggered under the attack. The winds forced the sand into their eyes, ears, mouths and nostrils. They choked as they fought their way blindly forward.

And the heat was devilish. The glittering sand flung back the hot rays of a sun that rolled drunkenly in a sky of dirty saffron, and the skin upon the exposed portions of the two men peeled beneath their eyes.

"It's hell," muttered Dave, as the hot

winds paused for a moment in their attack.

"Plus," growled Sam.

They couldn't look to the right or left during the greater part of that day, so they made no further discoveries as the hours went by. They made little progress, but the fact that they made any was something to marvel over. They found it impossible during the greater part of the day to exchange remarks, but each informed himself a score of times that it was the worst bit of traveling he had ever accomplished.

That night they buried a filled leather water-bag beside a gray boulder that rose up out of the sand like some prehistoric animal that had been turned to stone in some strange transformation, thousands of years before. The two consulted together in the hot hours of the night and they came to a decision regarding their whereabouts.

"We should strike the place tomorrow if old Herrick told the truth," said Dave.

"Uh, huh," muttered Sam.

"You think it's what he said it is?"

"What d'ye think I came this trip for?"

"Yep, I know, but now when it seems so close it's hard to believe the gold is lyin' round as thick as Herrick reckons it is."

"We'll see, Dave. We'll see. Get some sleep now an' we'll get an early start."

The Deschard brothers started off long before daylight. The desert was silent, watchful, a stripped dead thing waiting for the dawn to stir it into being. Dave and Sam walked at top speed, and as the hours went by they became certain that Herrick had given them the right direction. Before them rose a great hill of sand that stood up against the sky which was now a pale yellow, with little poisonous streaks of bloody red running through it.

"That's the big sand-hill," said Dave.

"Sure," muttered Sam. "We've got to walk round it. Herrick went round it to the right in goin' an' came back round the other side. Said there was nothin' to choose in the distance."

"Which side will we take?"

"Toss," said Sam.

Dave tossed a quarter, and as it went up into the air it glittered in the first beams of the sun that appeared above the rim of the desert.

"Heads for the right, tails for the left!" cried Sam.

"We take the left," said Dave. "Sun looks as if it's goin' to be another snorter."

They swung to the left to avoid the great sand-hill, and their shadows stretched out before them as the sun sprang over the rim and rode up into the wind-swept sky. They walked in silence, legs swinging freely, their breathing deep and regular. Two strong men were the Deschards. The desert that had a weird quality that would awe men like the Brooklynite whose message they had found scratched upon the tin cup, had no terrors for them. They had faced heat and privations time and time again, and the lure behind the hill drew them forward so that their speed increased as the hours slipped by.

Once Dave, the younger and most talkative, moistened his lips and put a question.

"What'll you do with it when you get it?" he asked.

There was a full five minutes silence between the question and the reply, a silence which Sam used to signify his dislike to queries of any kind.

"You make me tired," he growled. "We haven't got it yet."

"But we will get it!" snapped Dave.

"Then we'll talk about what we're goin' to do with it."

The remark silenced Dave. The sun climbed higher; their shadows shrunk. It seemed as if the great heat was licking up the inky splashes upon the glittering sands.

They were skirting the hill now. It was heavy walking, but the sand which tried to hold their shoes in a dry grip could not decrease their speed. Herrick's description of the ledge was before them, and with jaws thrust out they fought the heat and the sand, together with the thirst that was bred by the winds which struck them like the breath of a furnace.

They rounded the hill about noon and struck straight ahead. Once Dave laughed and looked at Sam.

"What's up?" asked Sam.

"We're runnin' an' we didn't know it," said Dave.

Sam pulled up for a second, then ran on again at increased speed. Every landmark was as Herrick described it. To the right, far off, a patch of cactus stood up like beckoning fingers; in front was a stretch of sand that was leprous-white. And beyond that white sand, so Herrick stated, was wealth untold.

They were running shoulder to shoulder when they struck it. Running with eyes

wide, nostrils distended, chests heaving mightily. The winds had gone down, a quiet had come upon the desert, a quiet that made them feel that the big sand-hill, the cactus patch and the occasional black boulders were watching them and speculating on the reason for the mad hurry.

They fell upon it together, fell forward upon their knees and clawed at it like two hungry carnivorous animals clawing at flesh.

Herrick had under-estimated the find. It was abnormally rich. The little nuggets cropped up out of the sand and blinked at the two brothers in the bright sunlight.

They drove their big fingers into the sand and pried them out. It was an alluvial find of the first magnitude. Little worn nuggets and coarse gold-dust—dust that was as plentiful as the sand with which it was mixed.

Sam, the silent, forgot himself and talked, but Dave took no notice of his brother's words. Dave was talking too, talking to the little lumps of gold which he dug out of their hiding-places.

"Little devils!" he would gurggle. "Little devils! Tryin' to hide from your Uncle Davy! Oh, you little devils! Oh, you beauties!"

For an hour or more they clawed away, then the mad fever brought about by the find passed and they became more normal. They found the pegs which Herrick had driven in and they staked out their claims beside the discoverer's. Sam stole a little from Herrick's claim. As they stepped across it, a piece of gold curiously like a set of false teeth stood up from the sand, and Sam picked it up and thrust it in his pocket.

"I'm goin' to take that back to Bill," he said slowly.

"To who?" cried Dave.

"I said I was goin' to take it back to Bill," growled Sam. "Bill Martin."

Dave stood for a minute and glared at his brother with red, wind-harried eyes.

"If I thought you'd give that swine a dime's worth of this stuff, I wouldn't have come a yard with you!" he roared.

Sam's face showed surprise. He looked as if he was possessed of a great desire to know why Dave took exception to his good intentions regarding Bill Martin, but he choked back the impulse to ask and flung out another question.

"Who asked you to come?" he cried.

"You did!"

Sam choked.

"I didn't want you!" he shouted. "I could have got here without you! Who got the story from Herrick? Who got it? Why, it was me, wasn't it? Me! Dodgast it! I didn't want you along!"

"You did! You did! You asked me, but if I had known that you'd give an ounce of this to Bill Martin, I'd have put a bullet into my head before I'd have come with you."

Sam took a step toward his brother, but Dave stepped quickly back from him. The younger brother's face was dark, his lips were drawn tight, his eyebrows were thrust forward over eyes that glinted spitefully.

"That was why you wouldn't answer me when I asked you back there what you were goin' to do with it!" he cried. "You were thinkin' of him then!"

"Dave," said Sam, "I wasn't thinkin' of Bill Martin then. I wasn't thinkin' of givin' any to anybody because I hadn't found any, but just when I saw that curiously-shaped bit, I thought of Bill an' said to myself I'll take that to him."

"You'll take it to him on your own!"

"Why Davy?"

"'Cause I'm not goin' back to Ecuarbo with any one who's carryin' presents for Bill Martin!"

But, Davy, there's enough here for a thousand!"

"There wouldn't be enough to give Bill Martin a nugget, not if there was a million times as much gold!"

"All right, son, but I'm goin' to take this to Bill."

"Take it, then!"

"Where you goin', Davy?"

"Back!"

"Wait a minute."

"No, I'm goin' by myself!"

"Dave!"

But Dave Deschard didn't answer. He was striding over the hot sand on the back trail, and Sam stood and watched him go.

The younger brother reached the point where the hill came up before him, then, instead of turning to the right and rounding the hill by the same route as that by which the two had come, he swung to the left and plodded doggedly forward.

Sam watching him made a strange throaty noise and sprang forward.

"The young beggar!" he cried. "He

thinks—he thinks that's the shortest route to the place where we cached the water. The young cuss! Durn him! I'll get there first now!"

Sam Deschard moving at a half-trot reached the spot where his brother had turned to the left. He stood for a second looking after the figure of Dave, then he swung to the right and quickened his pace.

Sam was mildly puzzled. He reviewed the conversation as he strode along. Of course, Dave was wrong to interfere with him as to the manner in which he would dispose of his wealth, still he found fault with himself as he flung the furlongs behind him. He should have told Dave his reasons for taking a present to Bill Martin. He would have told them if Dave had waited, but Dave had become so unreasonably angry that he had no chance to explain.

"Young cuss," said Sam good-naturedly. "Always was a hot-headed youngster! Flew off the handle before I could say five words to him!"

Dave, walking quickly, muttered to himself concerning Bill Martin.

"Old hog," he growled. "Takin' him a nugget of gold! Why, Sam's a plumb lunatic, that's what he is! Why—when I was stickin' up to Emily that old pig Martin said he'd fill me full of buckshot if I came near the house!"

The sun beat down upon the two and their wrongs became magnified as their brains bubbled beneath the intense heat. The djinns of the desert got on their wind horses and tormented the two by flinging the burning sand in their faces.

Their tempers did not improve as they trudged over the waste. Sam's concern for Bill Martin became a mental burr that rubbed Dave's temper, and Sam, thinking over what he thought the unreasonable anger of his younger brother, became convinced that Dave had made an attempt to jump upon his individual rights.

"What right has he got to say what I ought to do?" he growled. "He's not my boss! Young cuss ought to be spanked!"

And the sand devils cried out, "Spank him!" as they whizzed by on the hot winds.

The afternoon dragged. A swollen, red-eyed sun rolled down the western sky and basted the two brothers. The heat came through their shoes and burnt the soles of their feet. Their eyes ached, their tongues and throats were parched.

Thoughts of the water cached under the big boulder became more prominent as the dead hours of the afternoon slowly rolled by. And the thoughts of the water brought strange obsessions to the minds of both.

Sam Deschard's brain fathered a belief that Dave was trying to reach the water first in an effort to rob him of the means to get back to Ecuarbo, and Dave, driving his jaded limbs, felt certain that Sam was making an effort to beat him and that he would if he won the race to the water, leave him, Dave, to perish in the sand stretches.

"I'd hardly think young Dave would do a thing like this," Sam muttered to himself.

"I hardly thought old Sam would be so durned mean," Dave growled.

Both rounded the sand-hill and steered for the big boulder. The westering sun was in their faces, blinding them, harassing them with its fierce glare. They staggered under its attack. The quarrel affected their brains so that curious thoughts bubbled up within their minds. They began to hate each other, a curious plaintive hate which lapped against the affection of a lifetime and ate it steadily away.

"Durned young cuss," said Sam. "I'd do anything for that youngster an' he goes an' plays a trick like this on me!"

And Dave muttering with parched lips: "Old Sam doin' a dirty job on his brother! Why, the old fool ought to get a bullet in him for it!"

The sand djinns caught up Dave's remark as they had caught Sam's.

"Put a bullet in him!" they cried. "If you don't he'll get the water, and then we'll pour nice sand over your dead body like we poured it over the man from Brooklyn!"

The words put in his ears by the sand djinns took root in Dave's mind. He had no intention of shooting, but he thought that Sam might be tempted to shoot at him. If Sam was bad enough to leave him without water in the desert, he was bad enough to shoot. And Dave was certain that Sam would take all the water if he, Sam, won the race to the boulder.

They could see each other now, black blurs on the glittering white sands. Ahead of them was the rock, standing up boldly and beckoning to them.

Dave, oppressed with the belief that Sam might shoot at him, drew his revolver, and the devils of the desert laughed.

"Watch him!" they whispered. "Watch old Sam. He's tricky!"

"I'll watch him," muttered Dave. "I'm goin' to get my share of that water. I'm—"

Dave tripped and fell, and the revolver flung from his hand, struck a rock and exploded. The noise went out into the heavy silence and a thousand echoes chased it across the wastes.

Dave started to get to his feet, and, as he did so, another shot shattered the silence. A bullet sang through the air above Dave's head and he cursed loudly.

"The dog!" he cried. "I knew he would try an' pot me! I knew!"

And Sam Deschard, who had dropped to the ground when the noise of Dave's revolver came to his ears, uttered wild and blasphemous remarks about his brother.

"The young devil!" he growled. "I wouldn't have thought he'd try to plug me! I wouldn't have thought that! Gosh dang it! He's a rotter! That's what he is! A durned young rotter! I'd have done anything for him an' now the cuss tries to put a lump of lead into me!"

Both remained crouching on the sand, the flames of hatred blazing within their brains. Dave gave his opinion of Sam to the hot winds, and Sam unbosomed himself concerning Dave in words that were warmer than the winds that flattened the bosom of the White Desert. And the sand devils who were planning the fratricidal crime, laughed loudly as they fanned the hate of the two.

Dave regained his revolver and, carefully lifting himself above a protecting ledge of sand, took a shot at a gray blur which he knew was Sam in partial hiding.

And the gray blur replied as it burrowed deeper into the burning sand. Tragedy was stalking over the waste. The ledge of fabulous wealth was forgotten now. The desire of each was to murder the other, and fully certain of each other's intention, they took no chances.

The red-eyed sun fell on to a bed of purple clouds stretched upon the horizon line, and the little shadows of night ventured out upon the wastes. The sand darkened, the silence grew more oppressive.

"I'll slip ahead when it's dark," said Dave.

And Sam from his burrow said:

"I'll make a rush when it's dark. Durn young cuss! He don't deserve any quarter

but I wouldn't leave a dog to die here. I'll take my share of the water an' lope ahead."

The night thickened. It became so black that Dave, heat-crazy and jaded, put forward his hand as if to part the wall of black which was before him as he crept toward the big boulder. Nearer and nearer he crept. He had measured the distance and observed the direction before the night had closed down, and yard by yard he advanced.

He paused and tried to peer through the black impenetrable wall. He knew that he was near the boulder. The presence of it seemed to come out to him in some indescribable way that puzzled him. Crouching on the sand he leaned forward, ears alert for the slightest sound.

And the sound came. It was a sound that roused a fury within Dave's mind. It was the gurgling of water being poured from one vessel to another, and with a swift curse he lifted his revolver and fired.

For a minute after the sharp crack of the revolver, there was silence, then out of the darkness came a voice.

"Dave! Are you there, Dave?"

Dave swallowed a lump in his throat and answered—

"What is it?"

"You've got me, Dave. Broke my leg. But the goldarned bullet put a hole in the big water-bag. I've got my finger in the hole but—but I'm afeared I'm goin' to faint, Dave, so—so you'd better come an' plug it up. It's no use to me, but you'll want it, Dave."



DAVE DESCHARD gave a strange little cry and sprang forward. He groped around till he found his brother. Then he dropped on his knees beside him and babbled mad words of remorse.

"Sam, I didn't mean it!" he cried. "I was mad, Sam! Sam, I wouldn't do it to you! Why, Sam, you're the best brother that ever lived! I—I—"

"Plug that bag," murmured Sam faintly. "Yes, I know, Dave. You was plumb crazy with the heat or you wouldn't have started blazin' at me this afternoon."

"I didn't start!" cried Dave. "I didn't! My revolver dropped an' then—an' then you plugged away at me!"

Sam laughed grimly.

"That's curious," he said softly. "I knew it wasn't like you, Davy! I said to

myself, he's crazed an'—an' then I thought I'd get up here first an' get some of the water an' lope ahead!"

Dave was crying now. His big frame was shaken with sobs.

"Don't take on," said Sam quietly. "I'm out of the runnin' Dave. You lope on after a little while an' leave me here. I'll fix myself up for the long trail when I'm ready. Don't you be upset, boy. It was just bad luck, plain bad luck."

There was silence for a little while, then Sam spoke again. He was holding the hand of the younger brother.

"Do you know why I wanted to take that lump of gold to Bill Martin?" he said. "'Cause Sue an' I like each other. I hate old Bill, hate him just as much as you do, but Sue an' I are sweetheartin', Dave. Surprised you, didn't it, Dave?"

"Yes," answered Dave in a choked whisper.

"You'll take it to old Bill, won't you?" continued Sam.

Dave was weeping loudly.

"Sure," he blubbered. "Sure, I'll take it.

But—but Sam, I'm not goin' to leave you here. I'm goin' to stay with you. I'm goin' to stop——"

"No, you're not, Davy," interrupted Sam. "You're goin' back to Ecuarbo. There's no hope for me. That durned bullet shattered my thigh bone, an—an you couldn't make a mile a day with me. You're all right, old scout. We just got mad. We just got——"

Sam broke off and listened. Dave was listening too. Across the sands came a purring noise, a strange noise. For a full minute the two brothers listened in silence, then Dave sprang to his feet with a yell of joy.

"It's the automobile!" he screamed. "The automobile from Belahua! It's come up to Ecuarbo, an' they're coming to the ledge!"

He dropped down and kissed his brother on the forehead and Sam Deschard laughed.

"I'm glad," he said. "I knew you'd have given old Bill the gold, Dave, but I just want to hand it to the doggoned ole thief myself. I hate him worse than any feller ever hated his prospective father-in-law!"

ON THE WAY BACK



by
ROY P. CHURCHILL

Author of "Hereditary Evidence."

THERE was just one thing that Thomas Ferguson Holt remembered when he came back to consciousness in the Naval Hospital. He had come ashore with three hundred dollars to have a rip-roaring time and in Mike Bannon's place he had called for a glass of beer and refused to drink it because

a fly fell into it. That was all.

What became of the three hundred and what happened afterward he knew nothing about. He didn't care. His sole purpose in coming ashore was to lose the money pleasantly, for Tommy Holt, commonly known in the Naval Service as "Two-Fist," was a spree drinker. Now that the money

was gone and the fling was over he was happy and satisfied, except for a little curiosity as to details.

He beckoned a hospital apprentice to him and asked some questions.

"What's the matter with the left leg?" he demanded.

"Nothing," answered the apprentice. "We thought it was broken, but it isn't."

Two-Fist grunted his approval.

"How about this tight thing on my head?"

"Bandage. Four-inch cut on the scalp," checked off the other unmoved.

"What else?"

"Left arm sprained. Cut on thigh, both knees bruised."

He paused, and the injured man looked up at him and smiled.

"Go on and let's have the worst," he bantered.

"That's all," frowned the nurse, "but how you drunks can get beat up and run over by automobiles without being killed is more than I can tell you."

Two-Fist did not believe the automobile part, but he let it pass.

"Where am I?" he continued, "and how long before I can report for duty?"

"Naval Hospital. Two weeks," came the word-saving reply as the nurse hurried off on his round of duties.

Two-Fist took careful note of his injuries. He thought less of them than the nurse did, and set his mind on being up in a week.

The next day they moved him into another ward and let him eat solid food and gave him books to read. In the convalescent ward were a dozen men, recovering from a boiler explosion on a torpedo boat.

The man who had the cot next to Two-Fist had lost an arm and an eye, and that day being visitors' day his wife and little boy had come to see him. The wife was one of those small, ordinary women whom the troubles of the world seem to strike swift and hard. Two-Fist had seen so many like her that she made no impression on him, but the boy was different. He was ugly with an ugliness that was attractive, and attached to him was a dog.

Boy and dog made the rounds of the cots and men vied with each other to hold him near them. Some of the men had whittled out cunning toys for the boy, and these they drew from under pillows as offerings.

Two-Fist had nothing to offer, but the

dog gave him an inspiration. With sly squeakings to imitate a mouse, he soon had the dog clawing madly at his bed-clothing. The boy followed, and Two-Fist realized with a start that his bright eyes were terribly crossed.

"You got a mouse?" asked the boy eagerly, by the side of Two-Fist's cot.

"Sure," said Two-Fist.

"It ain't a white one, is it?"

"A pink-eyed one," said Two-Fist.

"Want to hear him squeak?"

The rest of the cots looked on jealously while the boy and dog pawed the sailor's bed for the imaginary mouse, finding it finally in a shadow on the wall made by Two-Fist's agile fingers. Then the fingers made rabbits and another dog barked, and geese and donkeys, all to the unbounded delight of the completely-won youngster.

When the bell sounded at the end of the visiting hour, Two-Fist had the boy on his cot with the dog at his feet, telling him a polar-bear story.

"Come and kiss your father good-by," called the man, and the boy obeyed, but turned at the door amid the calls of good-by from all over the room, to wave a special farewell to Two-Fist, who threw the boy a kiss, and settled back on his cot contentedly.

"That's a bright kid," he remarked to the father.

"He is that," spoke the proud parent, "even if he ain't much for looks with his crossed eyes."

"That don't hurt him none," consoled Two-Fist. "It'll make him lucky when he grows up."

"Not much it won't. One of the doctors here says that he's going to lose the sight of one of them bright eyes. Mebby both."

"Can't they fix it?"

"They can if it's done now," answered the man, while his face lost the brightness that the boy's visit had left there, "but before long it'll be too late."

"Oh, I don't know," comforted the other. "Doctors have been wrong about me more than once, and I don't see how a bright-eyed kid like that will ever go blind."

"I don't know either, but the missus believes what they say is so, and she's all to pieces about it."

"Well, why don't you go ahead and have him fixed up? You wouldn't have to take a chance then, right or wrong."

"It takes money," answered the other.

"You see, it's this way, if you don't mind a fellow telling you his troubles."

"Go ahead, if it will help any."

"I had a little money saved out of my pay, when I was knocked out, and I'm pretty sure of a pension when they discharge me, but there's the living of the wife and kid to manage somehow, and by raking and scraping every cent, I'll have enough to buy out that little curio shop of old man Cole's down by the Navy-Yard gate. It's a good paying little business and a one-armed man could manage it. But that leaves the boy's eyes unfixed, and to tell the truth, shipmate, I don't know what to do about it. If I wait to make the money out of the shop, it will be too late, if I ever do, and old man Cole won't wait for even part of the money. What would you do?" he finished miserably. "I can't see any way out."

"How much will it take?" asked Two-Fist sympathetically.

"There's some that would operate for fifty dollars, but the only sure man lives in Chicago, and it will take three hundred dollars to get the boy there and back and pay expenses."

"Three hundred dollars!" exclaimed Two-Fist. "Why, I—" but then he remembered where his three hundred dollars had gone, and lay back among his pillows. "Lemme think it over," he said.



THE next day when the boy came he ran straight to Two-Fist's cot.

"Mother says that polar bears can't talk," he said.

"The wild ones can," countered Two-Fist, "and so can monkeys. Want to hear about the monkey that wore nose-glasses?"

After the story was finished, the boy did some questioning.

"What're you sick for?" he said. Two-Fist did not answer, and the boy explained: "Daddy got burned on a boat, and Mike had a shell drop on his foot, but what hurt you?"

"I fell down," lied Two-Fist, with the first shame he had ever felt in telling of a spree.

"Was you climbing?" persisted the boy, and at this the listening men on the cots took notice and snickered.

Two-Fist glared around at them belligerently.

"Sure I was climbing, sonny, and I fell and got all bruised up."

The boy seemed satisfied, but after that

he did not come at once to Two-Fist's cot.

"What's the matter, son?" demanded Two-Fist. "Come on over and let's talk."

"Mother said you didn't fall. Said you been drunk, and to get drunk is bad."

The little face was drawn between the desire to come to Two-Fist and obedience to evident commands to stay away. Two-Fist tried the pink-eyed white mouse which squeaked, and only succeeded in making the boy more miserable. The crossed eyes blinked furiously, and a tear came out and poised ready to drop.

"Why, you poor little shaver!" exclaimed Two-Fist. "What they been telling you? I'm clean and sober now."

The mother nodded, and the boy came. He was shy and afraid, as on the first day, and asked Two-Fist many confusing questions, which caused the ward much merriment.

Two-Fist was facing a new experience. For the first time in his career he was heartily ashamed that he had ever been drunk. This shame was before the boy alone. He had only anger for the listening men, and promised them individually and collectively that he would punch their heads if he ever had the opportunity.

"You needn't be holding yourself up as a saintly teetotaler," he told Mike Conley. "I heard about you on the old *Kearsage*, you big fat slob, when they had to hoist you on deck in a boat like a sack of spuds."

Mike denied vociferously, and recounted some of Two-Fist's well-known exploits, which had not improved any with many tellings. The boy's father tried to make apologies, for he felt that Two-Fist had been sympathetic, at least.

"You see," he explained, "they have a ward here where they bring the drunks, and the inquisitive kid wanted to see the whole show. We had to make it out pretty bad to keep him away."

"I see," said Two-Fist. "If a man sees fit to go on a spree now and then some people think he's a total wreck."

"I'm a teetotaler myself," answered the father.

"I see," said Two-Fist again a little angrily; but then he fell to thinking of the three hundred dollars this man so sorely needed, and how a few days before he had squandered it. "Say," he said finally, "I'm still trying to figure out some scheme to help you."

"Thanks," said the man, "I wish I could think of something."

"What's cross-eyed?" asked the boy that afternoon.

"Why?" parried Two-Fist.

"Mother let me come alone today and a boy said it to me."

"It's a nickname," said Two-Fist, "it don't mean nothing."

"Have you got a nickname?"

"Mine's 'Two-Fist,'" answered Holt, and held up his two hands, clenched.

"But yours means something," said the boy quickly. "What's cross-eyed?"

"Well," explained Two-Fist, while the father listened anxiously, "you see your eyes are very bright, and they are fixed so that one eye can look at one thing and the other at another thing at the same time. People who can't do that are jealous and call those who can 'cross-eyed.'"

"Oh, yes," said the boy doubtfully, "but one of mine is better than the other. When I shut this eye I can see you with the other, but on this side I can't. I mean, not good."

The men in the cots all knew the story and listened quietly. There was no whispering. Two-Fist felt his responsibility and did the best he could.

"Oh, well!" he said. "Maybe a bug got in that eye. It will be all right tomorrow."



WHEN the day came for Two-Fist's release from the hospital, he was no nearer a solution of the problem than he had been in the beginning. His desire to do something for the boy was decidedly the strongest impulse he had ever known, and when he held the little boy close up in his arms for a long good-by he realized the price he was paying for his spree. Confronted with the biggest thing he had ever wanted to do in his life, he was unable to do it.

As he limped off down the street, turning at the corner to wave at the little figure on the gate-post of the hospital grounds, held there by the good arm of the crippled father, he was nearer to tears than he had ever been before. His leg-belt, just received from the yeoman of the hospital, felt like a fiery circle around his leg. He felt the slack emptiness of it, and was glad for only one thing—that the boy did not know that he had failed him.

The way to the Navy Yard being long, the day hot, and Two-Fist weak from his

injury, he stopped on the way for a glass of cool beer. As he raised the foaming brew to his lips, a wandering fly, buzzing lazily past, fell in, just as one had a few days before in Mike Bannon's place.

Two-Fist stood with the glass in his hand, looking at the fly, and in a moment things had lined themselves up in his mind. He remembered the attempted crossing of a street, the shock of an automobile, and remembered distinctly for the first time that he had not drunk a drop. He remembered, too, that his three hundred dollars was in large bills which would not make a bulge in his leg-belt.

Hastily he pulled up his trouser's leg and tore off the belt, groping inside the pocket with quick fingers. There was no money in it, and Two-Fist stared about him blankly, trying to get adjusted to the situation. He had started with three hundred dollars. He had not spent the money. He had not been drunk, yet the money was gone. Where was it, and who had it?

Still wondering, he started toward the Navy Yard with his mind actively at work. He remembered that there was a month's pay due him on board the ship. He would get that, come ashore again and search.

Two-Fist Holt walked into Mike Bannon's place and next day and asked for a small beer. When he was served he drank it in sips, while he looked about him. The place was much as it was before, even the same bartender was on duty, and there were no patrons, except a man in sailor's uniform who sat at the table in a corner, with his back to the door, seemingly half asleep over a sporting newspaper.

Finishing his beer, Two-Fist went out on the curb thinking. He was puzzled.

Just as before he dodged into the street and this time crossed safely, hailing a policeman.

"Could you give me about a minute?" he asked.

"Sure!" answered the cop.

"Were you on duty ten days ago on this beat when a sailor got struck by an automobile right here?"

"Sure," noted the policeman, looking the sailor over, "and if I'm not mistaken you're the guy."

"Right," answered Two-Fist. "Now tell me how it happened."

"Well," said the officer, "you came staggering out of Mike's place across the street

dodged behind a street-car, and the taxi hit you."

"I know all that," interrupted Two-Fist, "but what happened then?"

"Why, me and your pal picked you up and laid you out here on the sidewalk till the ambulance came."

"My pal?" asked Two-Fist.

"Yeh, another sailor was coming right along behind you, a slim, sort of liberty-breaking, dirty looking flatfoot."

"Did he carry my head or my feet?"

"Both," said the cop. "He tried to carry your head but couldn't lift you, so we swapped ends. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing much," said Two-Fist, "except I had three hundred bones in a leg-belt here on my left leg, and it disappeared somewhere."

"Your pal had plenty of chance, Bo, pawing you over first at the head and then at the feet. Go after him and I guess you'll get your money."

"Thanks," said Two-Fist. "Guess I'll do that."

Two-Fist crossed the street again and went into Mike Bannon's place. The sailor at the table in the corner looked up as he entered and then quickly turned his back and commenced to read the paper. Two-Fist had seen that the man's face was white and sallow, that the white tape on his uniform was begrimed and torn, and also that the ribbon on his flat cap bore the name of a collier which had been out of commission two years. His long lean fingers were those of a pickpocket. The fingers decided Two-Fist. The three were alone in the place, and he made his defy at once.

"Ten days ago," he said, "I came in here for a beer. When I went out I was knocked down by an automobile. This fellow over here in the corner followed me out, helped the policeman pick me up, and frisked me for three hundred dollars. I'm here for the money."

The bartender shrugged his shoulders and laughed, and the spurious sailor got up from his chair and came toward Two-Fist.

"What kind of pipe you tryin' to give us?" he said. "You must be dreamin'. I never saw you before and don't want to see you again. Fat there has got a button that calls for a bouncer. He's gotta record of three drunk sailors a week."

"That'll be all," cut in Two-Fist. "You two fellows know it's a frame-up. I hit

shore with the money. My whole ship's company knows it. Down the street a block I met our Chief Jimmy Legs. I was clean and sober then and had the three hundred. After you helped the policeman pick me up I didn't have it. Come clean, or I'll go the limit and black-list you on every ship in the service."

The bartender looked questioningly at the pickpocket. Two-Fist thought he caught an imploring look in his eye, but the other was defiant.

"Nothin' doin'," he sneered.

Two-Fist reasoned that the friendly policeman was about due at his station. He felt that he had a strong case in a police court as well as out. He would dodge in somewhere and telephone. Facing the two men he commenced to back out. With an oath the pickpocket rushed him, swinging a beer bottle by its neck.

Two-Fist knew how to meet such an attack. He had met many like it before. A man with a bottle has to have swinging room, and Two-Fist rushed and came up inside his antagonist's first vicious swing.

Before the pickpocket could back away for another blow, Two-Fist doubled him up with a knee to stomach. He was afraid to thrust his hands against the glass, and the knee was quicker and more effective.

As Two-Fist rushed, the bartender pressed a button. He felt instinctively that his ally, the pickpocket, was going to need help. Just as he fell groaning into a corner, a back door creaked, and Two-Fist turned to meet a new attack. He was a short, bullet-headed, barrel-chested man with long, gorilla-like arms. He stood between Two-Fist and the street door.

"Rausmit him!" ordered the bartender, and the bouncer sprang at the sailor with his business-like fists searching for an opening.

Two-Fist's move was to vault over a table into temporary safety, and smash a chair over the head of the pickpocket, who was up again, trying dizzily to aid his friends. This put the pickpocket out of the fight, and left the sailor and the bouncer to fight it out.

The man was a professional fighter, used to the rough and tumble, but Two-Fist was wary and quick and carried a good punch in either hand.

The two mixed it fiercely, almost evenly matched, and once or twice Two-Fist al-

most made the door, before the other drove him back. Seeing how the fight was going and fearing the outcome, the bartender at last took hand. Watching his chance he struck the sailor over the head with a bung-starter.

Two-Fist's guard relaxed an instant and the bouncer planted a knock-out on his jaw. As he fell he struck his head against a table and opened the old wound in his head which commenced to bleed slowly.

"Beat it quick, I hear the cops coming," whispered the bartender, and the bouncer made a hurried exit through the rear door just as two policemen came in through the front door.

"What's going on here?" they demanded.

The bartender met them with all the suavity and cunning of a long experience in such matters.

"These two sailors blow in here half pickled and start an argument about the war. First I knew they started scrapping. The little one hit the big one with a beer bottle, but before it took effect good the big one heaves a chair and puts the little one out-too. I was just starting to send in a call. You saved me the trouble."

The condition of the two men made the explanation plausible, and the officers accepted it without question. Two-Fist's old wound was still bleeding, and had made a mess of his face and clothing, while the other had a cut on his cheek from the broken chair.

"Ring for the ambulance," ordered the policeman. "These two need a hospital first."

The jolting over car tracks and cobbles soon brought Holt to consciousness. The other man lay inert beside him.

"I was a fool," muttered Two-Fist to himself. "Why didn't I play drunk and get this guy outside alone."

Then in a moment a daring idea came to him. The crook was still unconscious, the driver of the ambulance inattentive. Very cautiously he commenced a search of the other's body. In a little while, undetected, he lay back again smiling. When they lifted the pair of them out at the Naval

Hospital, Tommy Holt was apparently the limpest and the worst off.

When Two-Fist came back into the convalescent ward the next day the men whom he had left there greeted him hilariously.

"Well! if there ain't our old friend again!" said one. "Liked us so well you couldn't stay away, eh?"

"Sure thing," agreed Two-Fist. "The paths of glory lead but to the hospital. Where's that one-armed man and the kid I beat you fellows out of?"

"Packing up to leave," answered the hospital apprentice.

"Well, Assistant Saw-Bones, if you want to earn an honest dollar you tell that kid I'm back and want to see him!"

"You're on," accepted the other. "Gimme the dollar quick. I hear the kid coming now to say good-by to the ward, but if you hold out, it's no supper for yours."

Two-Fist produced the dollar, and turned to greet the boy.

"Well! Well! Like old times!" cried the sailor happily as the boy climbed to his place on the cot.

"I can't stay long," grieved the boy. "Dad said I mustn't be a minute. We're going away," he continued tremulously, "but now you're back I don't want to go away."

"That'll be all right, son," said Tommy chokily. "You better run along now. Here's a little package I want you to give your dad. He'll know about it. Tell him we had a run of luck, and to write me how it all comes out."

A month later the letter came. Two-Fist was chipping rust out of a scupper, trying to get rid of the extra duty he had accumulated during his stay ashore.

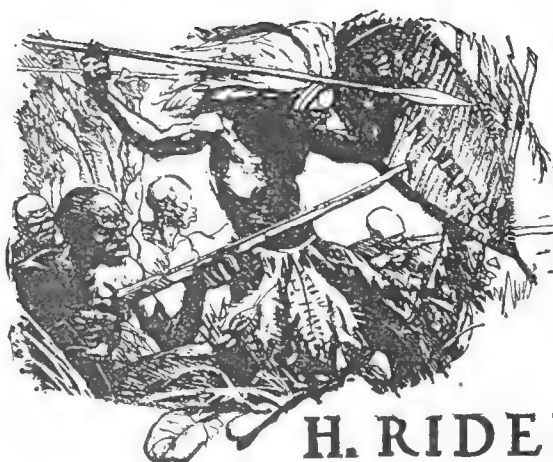
He threw down his scraper and whooped for joy when he read the postscript printed in staggering letters at the bottom:

I ain't cross eye enny more. Daddy saize I mus thank my fren 2 Fists which I sure-doo.

"By the holy pink-toed prophet and the spiked tail of Davy Jones! This is good news. It's worth six sprees!"

Very carefully he tore off the scrawl and laid it away in his ditty box.

FINISHED



A FIVE-PART STORY PART I

by

H. RIDER HAGGARD

Sir H. Rider Haggard and his famous stories of Africa are so well known to all readers of fiction that neither he nor the following tale needs any word of introduction. There are few among you who have not breathlessly turned the pages of "Allan Quatermain," "She," "King Solomon's Mines" and others of the stirring romances from the same pen.

We are glad that we have secured for America the author's latest book and that it is through *Adventure* you are to meet again your old friend *Allan Quatermain* in this newest story of his many adventurings. He is the same old *Allan* whom all of us have loved, respected and admired—modest, gentle, wise, unfailingly brave despite his own denials, sure death with a rifle, a dreaded foe, a stanch friend and above all things—human. As to this tale itself we are sorry that our first reading of it is over, but glad that you have still that pleasure before you.—The Editors.

INTRODUCTION

THIS book, although it can be read as a separate story, is the third of the trilogy of which *Marie* and *Child of Storm* are the first two parts. It narrates, through the mouth of Allan Quatermain, the consummation of the vengeance of the wizard Zikali, alias The Opener of Roads, or The-Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born, upon the royal Zulu House of which Senzangacona was the founder and Cetewayo, our enemy in the war of 1879, the last representative who ruled as a king.

Although, of course, much is added for the purposes of romance, the main facts of history have been adhered to with some faithfulness. With these the author became acquainted a full generation ago, Fortune

having given him a part in the events that preceded the Zulu War. Indeed he believes that with the exception of Colonel Phillips, who, as a lieutenant, commanded the famous escort of twenty-five policemen, he is now the last survivor of the party who, under the leadership of Sir Theophilus Shepstone or Sompseu, as the natives called him from the Zambesi to the Cape, were concerned in the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877.

Recently also he has been called upon as a public servant to revisit South Africa and took the opportunity to travel through Zululand. Here he stood by the fatal Mount of Isandhlwana which is described in these pages, among the graves of many whom once he knew, Colonels Durnford, Pulleine and others. Also he saw Ulundi's plain where the traces of war still lie thick

and talked with an old Zulu who fought in the attacking Impi until it crumbled away before the fire of the Martinis and shells from the heavy guns. The battle of the wall of Sheet Iron, he called it, perhaps because of the flashing fence of bayonets.

Lastly in a mealie patch he found the spot on which the corn grows thin, where King Cetewayo breathed his last, poisoned without a doubt, as he has known for many years. It is to be seen at the Kraal, ominously named El Yazi or, translated into English, "Finished."

The tragedy happened long ago, but even now the quiet-faced Zulu who told the tale, looking about him as he spoke, would not tell it all. "Yes, as a young man, I was there at the time, but I do not remember, I do not know—The Inkosi Lundanda (i.e. this Chronicler) stands on the very place where the king died—His bed was on the left of the door-hole of the hut," and so forth, but no certain word as to the exact reason of the sudden and violent death or by whom it was caused. The name of that destroyer of a king is forever hid.

In this story the actual cause of the declaration of war against the British Power is represented as the appearance of the white goddess, or spirit of the Zulus, who is, or was, called Nomkubulwana or Inkosazana-y-Zulu, i.e. the Princess of Heaven.

The exact circumstances which led to this decision are not now ascertainable, though it is known that there was much difference of opinion among the Zulu Indunas or great captains, and like the writer, many believe that King Cetewayo was personally averse to war against his old allies; the English. The author's friend, Mr. J. Y. Gibson, at present the representative of the Union in Zululand, writes in his admirable history:

"There was a good deal of discussion amongst the assembled Zulu notables at Ulundi, but of how counsel was swayed it is not possible now to obtain a reliable account."

The late Mr. F. B. Fynney, F.R.G.S., who also was his friend in past years and who, with the exception of Sir Theophilus Shepstone, perhaps knew the Zulus and the language better than any other official of his day, speaking of the fabled goddess wrote:

"I remember that just before the Zulu War Nomkubulwana appeared revealing

something or other which had a great effect throughout the land."

The use made of this strange traditional Guardian Angel in the following tale is not therefore an unsupported flight of fancy, and the same may be said of many other incidents which have been introduced to serve the purposes of the romance. Mameena, who haunts its pages, in a literal as well as figurative sense, is the heroine of *Child of Storm*, a book to which she gave her own poetic title.

CHAPTER I

ALLAN QUATERMAIN MEETS ANSCOMBE

YOU, my friend, into whose hand, if you live, I hope these scribbings of mine will pass one day, must well remember the 12th of April of the year 1877 at Pretoria. Sir Theophilus Shepstone, or Sompseu, for I prefer to call him by his native name, having investigated the affairs of the Transvaal for a couple of months or so, had made up his mind to annex that country to the British Crown.

It so happened that I, Allan Quatermain, had been on a shooting and trading expedition at the back of the Lydenburg district where there was plenty of game to be killed in those times. Hearing that great events were toward I made up my mind, curiosity being one of my weaknesses, to come round by Pretoria, which after all was not very far out of my way, instead of striking straight back to Natal.

As it chanced I reached the town about eleven o'clock on this very morning of the 12th of April and, trekking to the church square, proceeded to outspan there, as was usual in the seventies. The place was full of people, English and Dutch together, and I noted that the former seemed very elated and were talking excitedly, while the latter for the most part appeared to be sullen and depressed.

Presently I saw a man I knew, a tall, dark man, a very good fellow and an excellent shot, named Robinson. By the way, you knew him also, for afterwards he was an officer in the Pretoria Horse at the time of the Zulu war, the corps in which you held a commission. I called to him and asked what was up.

"A good deal, Allan," he said as he shook my hand. "Indeed we shall be lucky if all isn't up, or something like it, before the day

is over. Shepstone's Proclamation annexing the Transvaal is going to be read presently."

I whistled and asked:

"How will our Boer friends take it? They don't look very pleased."

"That's just what no one knows, Allan. Burgers the President is squared, they say. He is to have a pension; also he thinks it the only thing to be done. Most of the Hollanders up here don't like it, but I doubt whether they will put out their hands further than they can draw them back. The question is—what will be the line of the Boers themselves? There are a lot of them about, all armed, you see, and more outside the town."

"What do you think?"

"Can't tell you. Anything may happen. They may shoot Shepstone and his staff and the twenty-five policemen, or they may just grumble and go home. Probably they have no fixed plan."

"How about the English?"

"Oh! we are all crazy with joy, but of course there is no organization and many have no arms. Also there are only a few of us."

"Well," I answered, "I came here to look for excitement, life having been dull for me of late, and it seems that I have found it. Still I bet you those Dutchmen do nothing except protest. They are slim and know that the shooting of an unarmed mission would bring England on their heads."

"Can't say, I am sure. They like Shepstone who understands them, and the move is so bold that it takes their breath away. But as the Kaffirs say, when a strong wind blows a small spark will make the whole veld burn. It just depends upon whether the spark is there. If an Englishman and a Boer began to fight, for instance, anything might happen. Good-by, I have got a message to deliver. If things go right we might dine at the European tonight, and if they don't, goodness knows where we shall dine."

I nodded sagely and he departed. Then I went to my wagon to tell the boys not to send the oxen off to graze at present, for I feared lest they should be stolen if there were trouble, but to keep them tied to the trek-tow. After this I put on the best coat and hat I had, feeling that as an Englishman it was my duty to look decent on such an occasion, washed, brushed my hair—with me a ceremony without meaning, for it al-

ways sticks up—and slipped a loaded revolver into my inner poacher pocket.

Then I started out to see the fun, and, avoiding the groups of surly-looking Boers, mingled with the crowd that I saw was gathering in front of a long, low building with a broad stoep, which I supposed, rightly, to be one of the government offices.

Presently I found myself standing by a tall, rather loosely-built man whose face attracted me. It was clean-shaven and much bronzed by the sun, but not in any way good-looking; the features were too irregular and the nose was a trifle too long for good looks. Still the impression it gave was pleasant and the steady blue eyes had that twinkle in them which suggests humor. He might have been thirty or thirty-five years of age, and notwithstanding his rough dress that consisted mainly of a pair of trousers held up by a belt to which hung a pistol, and a common flannel shirt, for he wore no coat, I guessed at once that he was English born.

For a while neither of us said anything after the taciturn habit of our people even on the veld, and indeed I was fully occupied in listening to the truculent talk of a little party of mounted Boers behind us. I put my pipe into my mouth and began to hunt for my tobacco, taking the opportunity to show the hilt of my revolver, so that these men might see that I was armed. It was not to be found, I had left it in the wagon.

"If you smoke Boer tobacco," said the stranger, "I can help you." And I noted that the voice was as pleasant as the face, and knew at once that the owner of it was an English gentleman.

"Thank you, sir. I never smoke anything else," I answered, whereon he produced from his trousers pocket a pouch made of lion skin of unusually dark color.

"I never saw a lion as black as this, except once beyond Buluwayo on the borders of Lobengula's country," I said by way of making conversation.

"Curious," answered the stranger, "for that's where I shot the brute a few months ago. I tried to keep the whole skin but the white ants got at it."

"Been trading up there?" I asked.

"Nothing so useful," he said. "Just idling and shooting. Came to this country because it was one of the very few I had never seen, and have only been here a year. I think I have had about enough of it, though. Can you tell me of any boats

running from Durban to India? I should like to see those wild sheep in Kashmir."

I told him that I did not know for certain as I had never taken any interest in India, being an African elephant-hunter and trader, but I thought they did occasionally. Just then Robinson passed by and called to me—

"They'll be here presently, Quatermain, but Sompseu isn't coming himself."

"Does your name happen to be Allan Quatermain?" asked the stranger. "If so I have heard plenty about you up in Lo-bengula's country, and of your wonderful shooting."

"Yes," I replied, "but as for the shooting, natives always exaggerate."

"They never exaggerated about mine," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "Anyhow, I am very glad to see you in the flesh, though in the spirit you rather bored me because I heard too much of you. Whenever I made a particularly bad miss, my gun-bearer, who at some time seems to have been yours, would say, 'Ah! If only it had been the Inkosi Macumazahn, how different would have been the end!' My name is Anscombe, Maurice Anscombe," he added rather shyly.

Afterwards I discovered from a book of reference that he was a younger son of Lord Mountford, one of the richest peers in England.

Then we both laughed and he said:

"Tell me, Mr. Quatermain, if you will, what those Boers are saying behind us. I am sure it is something unpleasant, but as the only Dutch I know is *guten tag* and *Vootsack* (Good day and get out) that takes me no forwarder."

"It ought to," I answered, "for the substance of their talk is that they object to be *vootsacked* by the British government as represented by Sir Theophilus Shepstone. They are declaring that they won the land 'with their blood' and want to keep their own flag flying over it."

"A very natural sentiment," broke in Anscombe.

"They say that they wish to shoot all — Englishmen, especially Shepstone and his people, and that they would make a beginning now were they not afraid that the — English government, being angered, would send thousands of — English *rooi-batjes*, that is, red-coats, and shoot *them* out of evil revenge."

6

"A very natural conclusion," laughed Anscombe again, "which I should advise them to leave untested. Hush! Here comes the show."



I LOOKED and saw a body of blackcoated gentlemen with one officer in the uniform of a Colonel of Engineers, advancing slowly. I remember that it reminded me of a funeral procession following the corpse of the Republic that had gone on ahead out of sight.

The procession arrived upon the stoep opposite to us and began to sort itself out, whereon the English present raised a cheer and the Boers behind us cursed audibly. In the middle appeared an elderly gentleman with whiskers and a stoop, in whom I recognized Mr. Osborn, known by the Kaffirs as Malimati, the Chief of the Staff. By his side was a tall young fellow, yourself, my friend, scarcely more than a lad then, carrying papers.

The rest stood to right and left in a formal line. You gave a printed document to Mr. Osborn who put on his glasses and began to read in a low voice which few could hear, and I noticed that his hand trembled. Presently he grew confused, lost his place, found it, lost it again and came to a full stop.

"A nervous-natured man," remarked Mr. Anscombe. "Perhaps he thinks that those gentlemen are going to shoot."

"That wouldn't trouble him," I answered, who knew him well. "His fears are purely mental."

That was true since I know that this same Sir Melmoth Osborn as he is now, as I have told in the book I called *Child of Storm*, swam the Tugela alone to watch the great battle of Indondakasuka raging 'round him, and on another occasion killed two Kaffirs rushing at him with a right and left shot without turning a hair. It was reading this paper that paralyzed him, not any fear of what might happen.

There followed a very awkward pause such as occurs when a man breaks down in a speech. The members of the staff looked at him and at each other, then behold! you, my friend, grabbed the paper from his hand and went on reading it in a loud clear voice.

"That young man has plenty of nerve," said Mr. Anscombe.

"Yes," I replied in a low voice. "Quite right though. Would have been a bad omen if the thing had come to a stop."

Well, there were no more breakdowns, and at last the long document was finished and the Transvaal annexed. The Britishers began to cheer but stopped to listen to the formal protest of the Boer government, if it could be called a government when everything had collapsed and the officials were being paid in postage stamps. I can't remember whether this was read by President Burgers himself or by the officer who was called State Secretary. Anyway, it was read, after which there came an awkward pause as if people were waiting to see something happen.

I looked 'round at the Boers who were muttering and handling their rifles uneasily. Had they found a leader I really think that some of the wilder spirits among them would have begun to shoot, but none appeared and the crisis passed.

The crowd began to disperse, the English among them cheering and throwing up their hats, the Dutch with very sullen faces. The commissioner's staff went away as it had come back to the building with blue gums in front of it, which afterwards became Government House, that is all except you. You started across the square alone with a bundle of printed proclamations in your hand which evidently you had been charged to leave at the various public offices.

"Let us follow him," I said to Mr. Anscombe. "He might get into trouble and want a friend."

He nodded and we strolled after you unostentatiously. Sure enough you nearly did get into trouble. In front of the first office door to which you came, stood a group of Boers, two of whom, big fellows, drew together with the evident intention of barring your way.

"*Mynheeren*," you said, "I pray you to let me pass on the Queen's business."

They took no heed except to draw closer together and laugh insolently. Again you made your request and again they laughed.

Then I saw you lift your leg and deliberately stamp upon the foot of one of the Boers. He drew back with an exclamation, and for a moment I believed that he or his fellow was going to do something violent. Perhaps they thought better of it, or perhaps they saw us two Englishmen behind and noticed Anscombe's pistol. At any rate you marched into the office triumphant and delivered your document.

"Neatly done," said Mr. Anscombe.

"Rash," I said, shaking my head, "very rash. Well, he's young and must be excused."

But from that moment I took a great liking to you, my friend, perhaps because I wondered whether in your place I should have been daredevil enough to act in the same way. For you see I am English, and I like to see an Englishman hold his own against odds and keep up the credit of the country. Although, of course, I sympathized with the Boers who, through their own fault, were losing their land without a blow struck.

As you know well, for you were living near Majuba at the time, plenty of blows were struck afterwards, but of that business I can not bear to write. I wonder how it will all work out after I am dead and if I shall ever learn what happens in the end.

Now I have only mentioned this business of the annexation and the part you played in it, because it was on that occasion that I became acquainted with Anscombe. For you have nothing to do with this story which is about the destruction of the Zulus, the accomplishment of the vengeance of Zikali at the kraal named Finished, and, incidentally, the love affairs of two people in which that old wizard took a hand, as I did to my sorrow.

It happened that Mr. Anscombe had ridden on ahead of his wagons which could not arrive at Pretoria for a day or two, and as he found it impossible to get accommodation at the European or elsewhere, I offered to let him sleep in mine, or rather alongside in a tent I had. He accepted and soon we became very good friends.

Before the day was out I discovered that he had served in a crack cavalry regiment, but resigned his commission some years before. I asked him why.

"Well," he said, "I came into a good lot of money on my mother's death and could not see a prospect of any active service. While the regiment was abroad I liked the life well enough, but at home it bored me. Too much society for my taste, and that sort of thing. Also I wanted to travel; nothing else really amuses me."

"You will soon get tired of it," I answered, "and as you are well off, marry some fine lady and settle down at home."

"Don't think so. I doubt if I should ever be happy married. I want too much. One doesn't pick up an angel with a cast-iron

constitution who adores you, under every bush, which are the bare necessities of marriage." Here he laughed. "Also," he added, "the laughter going out of his eyes, "I have had enough of fine ladies and their ways."

"Marriage is better than scrapes," I remarked sententiously.

"Quite so, but one might get them both together. No, I shall never marry, although I suppose I ought as my brothers have no children."

"Won't you, my friend," thought I to myself, "when the skin grows again on your burnt fingers."

For I was sure they had been burnt, perhaps more than once. How, I never learned, for which I am rather sorry, for it interests me to study burnt fingers, if they do not happen to be my own. Then we changed the subject.

Anscombe's wagons were delayed for a day or two by a broken axle or a bog hole, I forget which. So, as I had nothing particular to do until the Natal post-cart left, we spent the time in wandering about Pretoria, which did not take us long as it was but a little dorp in those days, and chatting with all and sundry. Also we went up to Government House as it was now called, and left cards, or rather wrote our names in a book for we had no cards, being told by one of the staff whom we met that we should do so.

An hour later a note arrived asking us both to dinner that night, and telling us very nicely not to mind if we had no dress things. Of course we had to go, Anscombe rigged up in my second best clothes that did not fit him in the least, as he was a much taller man than I am, and a black satin bow that he had bought at Becket's store together with a pair of shiny pumps.

I met you, my friend, for the first time that evening, and in trouble too, though you may have forgotten the incident. We had made a mistake about the time of dinner, and, arriving half an hour too soon, were shown into a long room that opened on to the veranda. You were working there, being, I believe, a private secretary at the time, copying some despatch; I think you said that which gave an account of the annexation.

The room was lit by a paraffin lamp behind you, for it was quite dark, and the window was open, or at any rate unshuttered. The gentleman who showed us in, seeing

that you were very busy, took us to the far end of the room, where we stood talking in the shadow. Just then a door opened opposite to that which led to the veranda, and through it came His Excellency the Administrator, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, a stout man of medium height with a very clever, thoughtful face, as I have always thought one of the greatest of African statesmen. He did not see us, but he caught sight of you and said testily—

"Are you mad?" To which you answered with a laugh—

"I hope not more than usual, sir, but why?"

"Have I not told you always to let down the blinds after dark? Yet there you sit with your head against the light, about the best target for a bullet that could be imagined."

"I don't think the Boers would trouble to shoot me, sir. If you had been here I would have drawn the blinds and shut the shutters too," you answered, laughing again.

"Go to dress or you will be late for dinner," he said still rather sternly, and you went.

But when you had gone and after we had been announced to him, he smiled and added something which I will not repeat to you even now. I think it was about what you did on the annexation day of which the story had come to him.

I mention this incident because whenever I think of Shepstone, whom I had known off and on for years in the way that a hunter knows a prominent government official, it always recurs to my mind, embodying as it does his caution and appreciation of danger derived from long experience of the country, and the sternness he sometimes affected which could never conceal his love towards his friends. Oh, there was greatness in this man, although they did call him an "African Talleyrand." If it had not been so, would every native from the Cape to the Zambezi have known and revered his name as perhaps that of no other white man has been revered. But I must get on with my tale and leave historical discussions to others more fitted to deal with them.

We had a very pleasant dinner that night, although I was so ashamed of my clothes with smart uniforms and white ties all about me, and Anscombe kept fidgeting his feet because he was suffering agony from his new pumps which were a size too small. Everybody was in the best of spirits, for from all directions came the news that the annexation

was well received and that the danger of any trouble had passed away. Ah, if we had only known what the end of it would be!

It was on our way back to the wagon that I chanced to mention to Anscombe that there was still a herd of buffalo within a few days' trek of Lydenburg, of which I had shot two not a month before.

"Are there? By Jove!" he said. "As it happens I never got a buffalo; always just missed them in one sense or another, and I can't leave Africa with a pair of bought horns. Let's go there and shoot some."

I shook my head and replied that I had been idling long enough and must try to make some money, news at which he seemed very disappointed.

"Look here," he said, "forgive me for mentioning it, but business is business. If you'll come you sha'n't be a loser."

Again I shook my head, whereat he looked more disappointed than before.

"Very well!" he exclaimed. "Then I must go alone. For kill a buffalo I will; that is unless the buffalo kills me, in which case my blood will be on your hands."

I don't know why, but at that moment there came into my mind a conviction that if he did go alone a buffalo or something would kill him and that then I should be sorry my life.

"They are dangerous brutes, much worse than lions," I said.

"And yet you, who pretend to have a conscience, would expose me to their rage unprotected and alone," he replied with a twinkle in his eye which I could see even by moonlight. "Oh! Quatermain, how I have been mistaken in your character."

"Look here, Mr. Anscombe," I said, "it's no use. I can not possibly go on a shooting expedition with you just now. Only today I have heard from Natal that my boy is not well and must undergo an operation which will lay him up for quite six weeks, and may be dangerous. So I must get down to Durban before it takes place. After that I have a contract in Matabeleland whence you have just come, to take charge of a trading store there for a year; also perhaps to try to shoot a little ivory for myself. So I am fully booked up till, let us say, October, 1878, that is for about eighteen months, by which time I daresay I shall be dead."

"Eighteen months," replied this cool young man. "That will suit me very well.

I will go on to India as I intended, then home for a bit and will meet you on the 1st of October, 1878, after which we will proceed to the Lydenburg district and shoot those buffalo, or if they have departed, other buffalo. Is it a bargain?"

I stared at him, thinking that the Administrator's champagne had got into his head.

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed. "Who knows where you will be in eighteen months? Why, by that time you will have forgotten all about me."

"If I am alive and well, on the 1st of October, 1878, I shall be exactly where I am now, upon this very square in Pretoria, with a wagon, or wagons, prepared for a hunting trip. But as not unnaturally you have doubts upon that point, I am prepared to pay forfeit if I fail, or even if circumstances cause you to fail."

Here he took a check-book from his letter-case and spread it out on the little table in the tent, on which there were ink and a pen, adding—

"Now, Mr. Quatermain, will it meet your views if I fill this up for £250?"

"No," I answered; "taking everything into consideration the sum is excessive. But if you do not mind facing the risks of my non-appearance, to say nothing of your own, you may make it £50."

"You are very moderate in your demands," he said as he handed me the check which I put in my pocket, reflecting that it would just pay for my son's operation.

"And you are very foolish in your offers," I replied. "Tell me, why do you make such crack-brained arrangements?"

"I don't quite know. Something in me seems to say that we *shall* go this expedition and that it will have a very important effect upon my life. Mind you, it is to be to the Lydenburg district and nowhere else. And now I am tired, so let's turn in."

Next morning we parted and went our separate ways.

CHAPTER II

MR. MARNHAM

SO MUCH for preliminaries, now for the story.

The eighteen months had gone by, bringing with them to me their share of adventure, weal and woe, with all of which at present I have no concern. Behold me

arriving very hot and tired in the post-cart from Kimberley, whither I had gone to invest what I had saved out of my Matabeleland contract in a very promising speculation whereof today the promise remains and no more.

I had been obliged to leave Kimberley in a great hurry, before I ought indeed, because of the silly bargain which I have just recorded. Of course I was sure that I should never see Mr. Anscombe again, especially as I had heard nothing of him during all this while, and had no reason to suppose that he was in Africa. Still I had taken his £50 and he *might* come. Also I have always prided myself upon keeping an appointment.

The post-cart halted with a jerk in front of the European Hotel, and I crawled, dusty and tired, from its interior, to find myself face to face with Anscombe, who was smoking a pipe upon the stoep!

"Hullo, Quatermain," he said in his pleasant, drawling voice, "here you are, up to time. I have been making bets with these five gentlemen," and he nodded at a group of loungers on the stoep, "as to whether you would or would not appear, I putting ten to one on you in drinks. Therefore you must now consume five whiskies and sodas, which will save them from consuming fifty and a subsequent appearance at the Police Court."

I laughed and said I would be their debtor to the extent of one, which was duly produced.

After he was drunk Anscombe and I had a chat. He said that he had been to India, shot, or shot at whatever game he meant to kill there, visited his relations in England and thence proceeded to keep his appointment with me in Africa. At Durban he had fitted himself out in a regal way with two wagons, full teams and some spare oxen, and trekked to Pretoria where he had arrived a few days before. Now he was ready to start for the Lydenburg district and look for those buffalo.

"But," I said, "the buffalo have probably long ago departed. Also there has been a war with Sekukuni, the Basuto chief who rules all that country, which remains undecided, although I believe some kind of a peace has been patched up. This may make hunting in his neighborhood dangerous. Why not try some other ground, to the north of the Transvaal, for instance?"

"Quatermain," he answered, "I have come all the way from England, I will not say to kill, but to try to kill buffalo in the Lydenburg district, with you if possible, if not, without you, and thither I am going. If you think it unsafe to accompany me, don't come; I will get on as best I can alone, or with some other skilled person if I can find one."

"If you put it like that I shall certainly come," I replied, "with the proviso that should the buffalo prove to be non-existent or the pursuit of them impossible, we either give up the trip, or go somewhere else, perhaps to the country at the back of Delagoa Bay."

"Agreed," he said; after which we discussed terms, he paying me my salary in advance.

On further consideration we determined, as two were quite unnecessary for a trip of the sort, to leave one of his wagons and half the cattle in charge of a very respectable man, a farmer who lived about five miles from Pretoria just over the pass near to the famous Wonder boom tree which is one of the sights of the place. Should we need this wagon it could always be sent for, or, if we found the Lydenburg hunting-ground, which he was so set upon visiting, unproductive or impossible, we could return to Pretoria over the high-veld and pick it up before proceeding elsewhere.

These arrangements took us a couple of days or so. On the third we started, without seeing you, my friend, or any one else that I knew, since just at that time every one seemed to be away from Pretoria. You, I remember, had by now become the Master of the High Court and were, they informed me at your office, absent on circuit.



THE morning of our departure was particularly lovely and we trekked away in the best of spirits, as so often happens to people who are marching into trouble. Of our journey there is little to say as everything went smoothly, so that we arrived at the edge of the high-veld feeling as happy as the country which has no history is reported to do.

Our road led us past the little mining settlement of Pilgrim's Rest where a number of adventurous spirits, most of them English, were engaged in washing for gold, a job at which I once took a turn near this very place without any very startling success. Of the

locality I need only say that the mountainous scenery is among the most beautiful, the hills are the steepest and the roads are, or were, the worst that I have ever travelled over in a wagon. However, "going softly" as the natives say, we negotiated them without accident and, leaving Pilgrim's Rest behind us, began to descend towards the lowveld where I was informed a herd of buffalo could still be found, since, owing to the war with Sekukuni, no one had shot at them of late.

This war had been suspended for a while, and the Landdrost at Pilgrim's Rest told me he thought it would be safe to hunt on the borders of that Chief's country, though he should not care to do so himself.

Game of the smaller sort began to be plentiful about here, so not more than a dozen miles from Pilgrim's Rest we outspanned early in the afternoon to try to get a blue vildebeeste or two, for I had seen the spoor of these creatures in a patch of soft ground, or failing them some other buck.

Accordingly, leaving the wagon by a charming stream that wound and gurgled over a bed of granite, we mounted our salted horses, which were part of Anscombe's outfit, and set forth rejoicing. Riding through the scattered thorns and following the spoor where I could, within half an hour we came to a little glade. There, not fifty yards away, I caught sight of a single blue vildebeeste bull standing in the shadow of the trees on the further side of the glade, and pointed out the ugly beast, for it is the most grotesque of all the antelopes, to Anscombe.

"Off you get," I whispered. "It's a lovely shot; you can't miss it."

"Oh! Can't I?" replied Anscombe. "Do you shoot."

I refused, so he dismounted, giving me his horse to hold, and kneeling down solemnly and slowly covered the bull. Bang went his first barrel, and I saw a bough about a yard above the vildebeeste fall on to its back. Off it went like lightning, whereon Anscombe let drive with the left barrel of the Express, almost at hazard as it seemed to me, and by some chance hit it above the near fore-knee, breaking its leg.

"That was a good shot!" he cried, jumping on to his horse.

"Excellent," I answered. "But what are you going to do?"

"Catch it. It is cruel to leave a wounded animal," and off he started.

Of course I had to follow, but the ensuing ride remains among the more painful of my hunting memories. We tore through thorn trees that scratched my face and damaged my clothes; we struck a patch of antbear holes, into one of which my horse fell so that my stomach bumped against its head; we slithered down granite koppies and, this was the worst of it, at the end of each chapter, so to speak, always caught sight of that accursed bull which I fondly hoped would have vanished into space.

At length, after half an hour or so of this game, we reached a stretch of open, rolling ground, and there not fifty yards ahead of us was the animal still going like a hare, though how it could do so on three legs I am sure I do not know. We coursed it like greyhounds, till at last Anscombe, whose horse was the faster, came alongside of the exhausted creature, whereon it turned suddenly and charged.

Anscombe held out his rifle in his right hand and pulled the trigger, which, as he had forgotten to reload it, was a mere theatrical performance. Next second there was such a mix-up that for a while I could not distinguish which was Anscombe, which was the vildebeeste and which was the horse. They all seemed to be going 'round and 'round in a cloud of dust.

When things settled themselves a little I discovered the horse rolling on the ground, Anscombe on his back with his hands up in the attitude of prayer and the vildebeeste trying to make up its mind which of them it should finish first. I settled the poor thing's doubts by shooting it through the heart, which I flatter myself was rather clever of me under the circumstances. Then I dismounted to examine Anscombe, who, I presumed, was done for. Not a bit of it. There he sat upon the ground blowing like a blacksmith's bellows and panting out:

"What a glorious gallop! I finished it very well, didn't I? You couldn't have made a better shot yourself."

"Yes," I answered, "you finished it very well as you will find out if you will take the trouble to open your rifle and count your cartridges. I may add that if we are going to hunt together I hope you will never lead me such a fool's chase again."

He rose, opened the rifle and saw that it was empty, for although he had never reloaded he had thrown out the two cartridges which he discharged in the glen.

"By Jingo!" he said. "You must have shot it, though I could have sworn that it was I. Quatermain, has it ever struck you what a strange thing is the human imagination?"

"Drat the human imagination," I answered, wiping away the blood that was trickling into my eye from a thorn scratch. "Let's look at your horse. If it is lamed you will have to ride Imagination back to the wagon which must be six miles away, that is, if we can find it before dark."

Sighing out something about a painfully practical mind, he obeyed, and when the beast was proved to be nothing more than blown and a little bruised, made remarks as to the inadvisability of dwelling on future events, which I reminded him had already been better summed up in the New Testament.

After this we contemplated the carcass of the vildebeeste which it seemed a pity to leave to rot. Just then Anscombe, who had moved a few yards to the right out of the shadow of an obstructing tree, exclaimed—

"I say, Quatermain, come here and tell me if I have been knocked silly, or if I really see a quite unusual kind of house built in ancient Grecian style set in a divine landscape."

"Temple to Diana, I expect," I remarked as I joined him on the further side of the tree.



I LOOKED and rubbed my eyes. There, about half a mile away, situated in a bay of the sweeping hills and overlooking the measureless expanse of bush-veld beneath, was a remarkable house, at least for those days and that part of Africa. To begin with the situation was superb. It stood on a green and swelling mound behind which was a wooded kloof where ran a stream that at last precipitated itself in a waterfall over a great cliff. Then in front was that glorious view of the bushveld stretching away to the Oliphant's River and melting at last into the dim line of the horizon, at which a man might look for a lifetime and not grow tired.

The house itself also, although not large, was of a kind new to me. It was deep and narrow, and in front of it were four columns that carried the roof which projected so as to form a wide verandah. Moreover it seemed to be built of marble which glistened like snow in the setting sun. In short, in

that lonely wilderness, at any rate from this distance, it did look like the deserted shrine of some forgotten god.

"Well, I'm bothered!" I said.

"So am I," answered Anscombe, "to know the name of the Lydenburg district architect whom I should like to employ; though I suspect it is the surroundings that make the place look so beautiful. Hullo! There comes somebody, but he doesn't look like an architect; he looks like a wicked baronet disguised as a Boer."

True enough, 'round a clump of bush appeared an unusual sort of person, mounted on a very good horse. He was tall, thin and old, at least he had a long white beard which suggested age, although his figure, so far as it could be seen beneath his rough clothes, seemed vigorous. His face was clean cut and handsome, with a rather hooked nose and his eyes were gray, but as I saw when he came up to us, somewhat bloodshot at the corners. His general aspect was refined and benevolent, and as soon as he opened his mouth I perceived that he was a person of gentle breeding. And yet there was something about him, something in his atmosphere, so to speak, that I did not like. Before we parted that evening I felt sure that in one way or another he was a wrongdoer, not straight; also that he had a violent temper.

He rode up to us and asked in a pleasant voice, although the manner of his question, which was put in bad Dutch, was not pleasant—

"Who gave you leave to shoot on our land?"

"I did not know that any leave was required; it is unusual in these parts," I answered politely in English. "Moreover, this buck was wounded miles away."

"Oh!" he exclaimed in the same tongue. "That makes a difference, though I expect it was still on our land, for we have a lot; it is cheap about here." Then after studying us a little, he added apologetically, "You mustn't think me strange, but the fact is my daughter hates things to be killed near the house, which is why there's so much game about."

"Then pray make her our apologies," said Anscombe, "and say that it shall not happen again."

He stroked his long beard and looked at us, for by now he had dismounted, then said—

"Might I ask you gentlemen your names?"

"Certainly," I replied. "I am Allan Quatermain, and my friend is the Hon. Maurice Anscombe."

He started and said:

"Of Allan Quatermain of course I have heard. The natives told me that you were trekking to these parts; and if you, sir, are one of Lord Mountford's sons, oddly enough I think I must have known your father in my youth. Indeed I served with him in the Guards."

"How very strange," said Anscombe. "He's dead now and my brother is Lord Mountford. Do you like life here better than that in the Dragoon Guards? I am sure I should."

"Both of them have their advantages," he answered evasively, "of which, if, as I think, you are also a soldier, you can judge for yourself. But won't you come up to the house? My daughter Heda is away, and my partner Mr. Todd" (as he mentioned this name I saw a blue vein, which showed above his cheekbone, swell as if under pressure of some secret emotion) "is a retiring sort of a man; indeed some might think him sulky until they came to know him. Still, we can make you comfortable and even give you a decent bottle of wine."

"No, thank you very much," I answered, "we must get back to the wagon or our servants will think that we have come to grief. Perhaps you will accept the *vilde-beeste* if it is of any use to you."

"Very well," he said in a voice that suggested regret struggling with relief. To the buck he made no allusion, perhaps because he considered that it was already his own property. "Do you know your way? I believe your wagon is camped out to the east by what we call the Granite stream. If you follow this Kaffir path," and he pointed to a track near by, "it will take you quite close."

"Where does the path run to?" I asked. "There are no kraals about, are there?"

"Oh! To the Temple, as my daughter calls our house. My partner and I are labor agents; we recruit natives for the Kimberley Mines," he said in explanation, adding, "Where do you propose to shoot?"

I told him.

"Isn't that rather a risky district?" he said. "I think that Sekukuni will soon be giving more trouble, although there is a

truce between him and the English. Still he might send a regiment to raid that way."

I wondered how our friend knew so much of Sekukuni's possible intentions, but only answered that I was accustomed to deal with natives and did not fear them.

"Ah, well," he said, "you know your own business best. But if you should get into any difficulty, make straight for this place, as the Basutos will not interfere with you here."

Again I wondered why the Basutos should look upon this particular spot as sacred, but thinking it wisest to ask no questions, I only said:

"Thank you very much. We'll bear your invitation in mind, Mr.—"

"Marnham."

"Marnham," I repeated after him. "Goodby, and many thanks for your kindness."

"One question," broke in Anscombe, "if you will not think me rude. What is the name of the architect who designed that most romantic-looking house of yours which seems to be built of marble?"

"My daughter designed it, or at least I think she copied it from some old drawing of a ruin. Also it is marble; there's a whole hill of the stuff not a hundred yards from the door, so it was cheaper to use than anything else. I hope you will come and see it on your way back, though it is not as fine as it appears from a distance. It would be very pleasant after all these years to talk to an English gentleman again."

Then we parted, I rather offended because he did not seem to include me in the description, he calling after us—

"Stick close to the path through the patch of big trees, for the ground is rather swampy and it's getting dark."

Presently we came to the place he mentioned where the timber, although scattered, was quite large for South Africa, of the yellow-wood species, and interspersed wherever the ground was dry with huge euphorbias of which the tall finger-like growths and sad grey coloring looked unreal and ghostlike in the waning light.

Following the advice given to us we rode in single file along the narrow path, fearing lest otherwise we should tumble into some bog hole, until we came to higher land covered with the scattered thorns of the country.

"Did that bush give you any particular

impression?" asked Anscombe a minute or two later.

"Yes," I answered, "it gave me the impression that we might catch fever there. See the mist that lies over it," and turning in my saddle I pointed with the rifle in my hand to what looked like a mass of cotton wool over which, without permeating it, hung the last red glow of sunset, producing a curious and indeed rather unearthly effect. "I expect that thousands of years ago there was a lake yonder, which is why trees grow so big in the rich soil."

"You are curiously mundane, Quatermain," he answered. "I ask you of spiritual impressions and you dilate to me of geological formations and the growth of timber. You felt nothing in the spiritual line?"

"I felt nothing except a chill," I answered, for I was tired and hungry. "What the devil are you driving at?"

"Have you got that flask of Hollands about you, Quatermain?"

"Oh, those are the spirits you are alluding to," I remarked with sarcasm as I handed it to him.

He took a good pull and replied—

"Not at all, except in the sense that bad spirits require good spirits to correct them, as the Bible teaches. To come to facts," he added in a changed voice, "I have never been in a place that depressed me more than that thrice accursed patch of bush."

"Why did it depress you?" I asked, studying him as well as I could in the fading light.

To tell the truth, I feared lest he had knocked his head when the vildebeeste upset him and was suffering from delayed concussion.

"Can't tell you, Quatermain. I don't look like a criminal, do I? Well, I entered those trees feeling a fairly honest man, and I came out of them feeling like a murderer. It was as though something terrible had happened to me there; it was as though I had killed some one there. Ugh!" He shivered and took another pull at the Hollands.

"What bosh!" I said. "Besides, even if it were to come true, I am sorry to say I've killed lots of men in the way of business and they don't bother me over-much."

"Do you ever kill one to win a woman?"

"Certainly not. Why, that would be murder. How can you ask me such a thing? But I have killed several to win cattle," I reflected aloud, remembering my expedition with Saduka against the chief Bangu,

and some other incidents in my career.

"I appreciate the difference, Quatermain. If you kill for cows, it is justifiable homicide; if you kill for women, it is murder."

"Yes," I replied, "that is how it seems to work out in Africa. You see, women are higher in the scale of creation than cows, therefore crimes committed for their sake are enormously greater than those committed for cows, which just makes the difference between justifiable homicide and murder."

"Good Lord! What an argument!" he exclaimed and relapsed into silence.

Had he been accustomed to natives and their ways he would have understood the point much better than he did, though I admit it is difficult to explain.

In due course we reached the wagon without further trouble. While we were smoking our pipes after an excellent supper, I asked Anscombe his impressions of Mr. Marnham.

"Queer cove, I think," he answered. "Been a gentleman, too, and still keeps the manners, which isn't strange if he is one of the Marnhams, for they are a good family. I wonder he mentioned having served with my father."

"It slipped out of him. Men who live a lot alone are apt to be surprised into saying things they regret afterwards, as I noticed he did. But why do you wonder?"

"Because as it happens, although I have only just recalled it, my father used to tell some story about a man named Marnham in his regiment. I can't remember the details, but it had to do with cards when high stakes were being played for, and with the striking of a superior officer in the quarrel that ensued, as a result of which the striker was requested to send in his papers."

"It may not have been the same man."

"Perhaps not, for I think that more than one Marnham served in that regiment. But I remember my father saying, by way of excuse for the person concerned, that he had a most ungovernable temper. I think," he added, "that he left the country and took service in some army on the Continent. I should rather like to clear the thing up."

"It isn't probable that you will, for even if you should ever meet this Marnham again, I think you would find he will hold his tongue about his acquaintance with your father."

"I wonder what Miss Heda is like," went on Anscombe after a pause. "I am curious to see a girl who designs a house on the model of an ancient ruin."

"Well, you won't, for she's away somewhere. Besides we are looking for buffalo, not girls, which is a good thing as they are less dangerous."

CHAPTER III

THE HUNTERS HUNTED

WHILE I was taking off my boots I heard a nose of jabbering in some native tongue which I took to be Sisutu, and not wishing to go to the trouble of putting them on again, called to the driver of the wagon to find out what it was. This man was a Cape Colony Kaffir, a Fingo I think, with a touch of Hottentot in him. He was an excellent driver, indeed I do not think I have ever seen a better, and by no means a bad shot. Among Europeans he rejoiced in the name of Footsack, a Boer Dutch term which is generally addressed to troublesome dogs and means "Get out."

To tell the truth, had I been his master he would have got out, as I suspected him of drinking, and generally did not altogether trust him. Anscombe, however, was fond of him because he had shown courage in some hunting adventure in Matabeleland, I think it was at the shooting of that very dark-colored lion whose skin had been the means of making us acquainted nearly two years before. Indeed he said that on this occasion Footsack had saved his life, though from all that I could gather I do not think this was quite the case.

Also the man, who had been on many hunting trips with sportsmen, could talk Dutch well and English enough to make himself understood, and therefore was useful.

He went as I bade him, and coming back presently, told me that a party of Basutos, about thirty in number, who were returning from Kimberley, where they had been at work in the mines, under the leadership of a man named Karl, asked leave to camp by the wagon for the night, as they were afraid to go on to Tample in the dark.

At first I could not make out what "Tample" was, as it did not sound like a native name. Then I remembered that Mr. Marnham had spoken of his house as being

called the Temple, of which, of course, Tample was a corruption; also that he said he and his partner were labor agents.

"Why are they afraid?" I asked.

"Because, Baas, they say that they must go through a wood in a swamp, which they think is haunted by spooks, and they much afraid of spooks."

"What spooks?" I asked.

"Don't know, Baas. They say spook of some one who has been killed."

"Rubbish," I replied. "Tell them to go and catch the spook; we don't want a lot of noisy fellows howling chanties here all night."

Then it was that Anscombe broke in in his humorous, rather drawling voice.

"How can you be so hard-hearted, Quatermain? After the supernatural terror that, as I told you, I experienced in that very place, I wouldn't condemn a kicking mule to go through it in this darkness. Let the poor devils stay; I daresay they are tired."

So I gave in, and presently saw their fires beginning to burn through the end canvas of the wagon which was unlaced because the night was hot. Also later on I woke up, about midnight I think, and heard voices talking, one of which I reflected sleepily sounded very like that of Footsack.

Waking very early, as is my habit, I peeped out of the wagon, and through the morning mist perceived Footsack in converse with a particularly villainous-looking person. I at once concluded this must be Karl, evidently compounded of about fifteen parts of various native bloods to one of white, who, to add to his attractions, was deeply scarred with smallpox and possessed a really alarming squint. It seemed to me that Footsack handed to this man something that looked suspiciously like a bottle of squareface wrapped up in dried grass, and that the man handed back to Footsack some small object which he put in his mouth.

Now, I wondered to myself, what is there of value that one who does not eat sweets would stow away in his mouth. Gold coin perhaps, or a quid of tobacco, or a stone. Gold was too much to pay for a bottle of gin, tobacco was too little, but how about the stone? What stone? Who wanted stones? Then suddenly I remembered that these people were said to come from Kimberley, and whistled to myself.

Still I did nothing, principally because the mist was still so dense that although I could see the men's faces, I could not clearly see the articles which they passed to each other about two feet lower, where it still lay very thickly, and to bring any accusation against a native which he can prove to be false is apt to destroy authority. So I held my tongue and waited my chance. It did not come at once, for before I was dressed those Basutos had departed together with their leader Karl, for now that the sun was up they no longer feared the haunted bush.

It came later, thus: We were trekking along between the thorns upon a level and easy track which enabled the driver Footsack to sit upon the *voorkisse* or driving box of the wagon, leaving the lad who is called the voorlooper to lead the oxen.

Anscombe was riding parallel to the wagon in the hope of killing some guineafowl for the pot (though a very poor shot with a rifle he was good with a shot-gun). I, who did not care for this small game, was seated smoking by the side of Footsack who, I noted, smelt of gin and generally showed signs of dissipation. Very suddenly I said to him—

"Show me that diamond which Karl gave to you this morning in payment for the bottle of your master's drink."

It was a bow drawn at a venture, but the effect of the shot was remarkable. Had I not caught it, the long bamboo whip Footsack held would have fallen to the ground, while he collapsed in his seat like a man who has received a bullet in his stomach.

"Baas," he gasped, "Baas, how did you know?"

"I knew," I replied, "in the same way that I know everything. Show me the diamond."

"Baas," he said, "it was not the Baas Anscombe's gin, it was some I bought in Pilgrim's Rest."

"I have counted the bottles in the case and know very well whose gin it was," I replied ambiguously, for the reason that I had done nothing of the sort. "Show me the diamond."

Footsack fumbled about his person, his hair, his waistcoat pockets and even his moocha, and ultimately from somewhere produced a stone which he handed to me. I looked at it, and from the purity of color and size, judged it to be a diamond worth £200,

or possibly more. After careful examination I put it into my pocket, saying—

"This is the price of your master's gin and therefore belongs to him as much as it does to anybody. Now if you want to keep out of trouble, tell me—whence came it into the hands of that man, Karl?"

"Baas," replied Footsack, trembling all over, "how do I know? He and the rest have been working at the mines; I suppose he found it there."

"Indeed! And did he find others of the same sort?"

"I think so, Baas. At lest he said that he had been buying bottles of gin with such stones all the way down from Kimberley. Karl is a great drunkard, Baas, as I am sure, who have known him for years."

"That is not all," I remarked, keeping my eyes fixed on him. "What else did he say?"

"He said, Baas, that he was very much afraid of returning to the Baas Marnham whom the Kaffirs call Whitebeard, with only a few stones left."

"Why was he afraid?"

"Because the Baas Whitebeard, he who dwells at Tample, is, he says, a very angry man if he thinks himself cheated, and Karl is afraid lest he should kill him as another was killed, he whose spook haunts the wood through which those silly people feared to pass last night."

"Who was killed and who killed him?" I asked.

"Baas, I don't know," replied Footsack, collapsing into sullen silence in a way that Kaffirs have when suddenly they realize that they have said too much. Nor did I press the matter further, having learned enough.

What had I learned? This: that Messrs. Marnham & Todd were illicit diamond buyers, I.D.B.'s as they are called, who had cunningly situated themselves at a great distance from the scene of operations beyond the reach of civilized law. Probably they were engaged also in other nefarious dealings with Kaffirs, such as supplying them with guns wherewith to make war upon the whites. Sekukuni had been fighting us recently, so that there would be a very brisk market for rifles. This, too, would account for Marnham's apparent knowledge of that Chief's plans. Possibly, however, he had no knowledge and only made a pretence of it to keep us out of the country.

Later on I confided the whole story and my suspicions to Anscombe, who was much interested.

"What picturesque scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "We really ought to go back to the Temple. I have always longed to meet some real live I.D.B.'s."

"It is probable that you have done that already without knowing it. For the rest, if you wish to visit that den of iniquity, you must do so alone."

"Wouldn't white sepulchre be a better term, especially as it seems to cover dead men's bones?" he replied in his frivolous manner.

Then I asked him what he was going to do about Footsack and the bottle of gin, which he countered by asking me what I was going to do with that diamond.

"Give it to you as Footsack's master," I said, suiting the action to the word. "I don't wish to be mixed up in these doubtful transactions."

Then followed a long argument as to who was the real owner of the stone, which ended in its being hidden away to be produced if called for, and in Footsack, who ought to have had a round dozen, receiving a scolding from his master, coupled with the threat that if he stole more gin he would be handed over to a magistrate—when we met one.



ON THE following day we reached the hot, low-lying veld which the herd of buffalo was said to inhabit. Next morning, however, when we were making ready to begin hunting, a Basuto Kaffir appeared who, on being questioned, said that he was one of Sekukuni's people sent to this district to look for two lost oxen. I did not believe this story, thinking it more probable that he was a spy, but asked him whether in his hunt for oxen he had come across the buffalo.

He replied that he had, a herd of thirty-two of them, counting the calves, but that they were over the Oliphant's River about five-and-twenty miles away, in a valley between some outlying hills and the rugged range of mountains beyond which was situated Sekukuni's town. Moreover, in proof of his story he showed me spoor of the beasts heading in that direction which was quite a week old.

Now for my part, as I did not think it wise to get too near to Sekukuni, I should

have given them up and gone to hunt something else. Anscombe, however, was of a different opinion and pleaded hard that we should follow them. The upshot was that we decided to trek to the Oliphant's River, camp there and explore the bush on the other side on horseback, never going so far from the wagon that we could not reach it again before nightfall.

This, then, we did, outspanning that evening by the hot but beautiful river which was still haunted by a few hippopotamus and many crocodiles, one of which we shot before turning in. Next morning, having breakfasted off cold guinea fowl, we mounted, crossed the river by a ford which was quite as deep as I liked, to which the Kaffir path led us, and, leaving Footsack with the two other boys in charge of the wagon, began to hunt for the buffalo in the rather swampy bush that stretched from the further bank to the slope of the first hills, eight or ten miles away.

I did not much expect to find them, as the Basuto had said that they had gone over these hills, but either he lied or they had moved back again. Not half a mile from the river bank, just as I was about to dismount to stalk a fine waterbuck of which I caught sight standing among some coarse grass and bushes, my eye fell upon buffalo spoor that from its appearance I knew could not be more than a few hours old. Evidently the beasts had been feeding here during the night and at dawn had moved away to sleep in the dry bush nearer the hills.

Beckoning to Anscombe, who fortunately had not seen the waterbuck, at which he would certainly have fired, thereby perhaps frightening the buffalo, I showed him the spoor that we at once started to follow.

Soon it led us into other spoor, that of a whole herd of thirty or forty beasts indeed, which made our task quite easy, at least till we came to harder ground, for the animals had gone a long way. An hour or more later, when we were about seven miles from the river, I perceived ahead of us, for we were now almost at the foot of the hills, a cool and densely-wooded kloof.

"That is where they will be," I said. "Now come on carefully and make no noise."

We rode to the wide mouth of the kloof where the signs of the buffalo were numerous and fresh, dismounted and tied our horses

to a thorn, so as to approach them silently on foot. We had not gone two hundred yards through the bush when suddenly about fifty paces away, standing broadside on in the shadow between two trees, I saw a splendid old bull with a tremendous pair of horns.

"Shoot," I whispered to Anscombe, "you will never get a better chance. It is the sentinel of the herd."

He knelt down, his face quite white with excitement, and covered the bull with his Express.

"Keep cool," I whispered again, "and aim behind the shoulder, half-way down."

I don't think he heard me, for at that moment off went the rifle. He hit the beast somewhere, as I heard the bullet clap, but not fatally, for it turned and lumbered off up the kloof, apparently unhurt, whereon he sent the second barrel after it, a clean miss this time.

Then of a sudden all about us appeared buffaloes that had, I suppose, been sleeping invisible to us. These, with snorts and bellows, rushed off towards the river, for having their senses about them, they had no mind to be trapped in the kloof. I could only manage a shot at one of them, a large and long-horned cow which I knocked over quite dead. We went and looked at my dead cow which I had caught through the heart.

"It's cruel to kill these things," I said, "for I don't know what use we are going to make of them, and they must love life as much as we do."

"We'll cut the horns off," said Anscombe.

"You may if you like," I answered, "but you will find it a tough job with a sheath knife."

"Yes, I think that shall be the task of the worthy Footsack tomorrow," he replied. "Meanwhile let us go and finish off my bull, as Footsack & Co. may as well bring home two pair of horns as one."

I looked at the dense bush, and knowing something of the habits of wounded buffaloes, reflected that it would be a nasty job. Still I said nothing, because if I hesitated, I knew he would want to go alone. So we started.

Evidently the beast had been badly hit, for the blood spoor was easy to follow. Yet it had been able to retreat up to the end of the kloof that terminated in a cliff over which trickled a stream of water. Here it

was not more than a hundred paces wide, and on either side of it were other precipitous cliffs. As we went from one of these a war-horn, such as the Basutos use, was blown. Although I heard it, oddly enough, I paid no attention to it at the time, being utterly intent upon the business in hand.

Following a wounded buffalo bull up a tree-clad and stony kloof is no game for children, as these beasts have a habit of returning on their tracks and then rushing out to gore you. So I went on with every sense alert, keeping Anscombe well behind me.

As it happened our bull had either been knocked silly or inherited no guile from his parents. When he found he could go no further he stopped, waited behind a bush, and when he saw us he charged in a simple and primitive fashion. I let Anscombe fire, as I wished him to have the credit of killing it all to himself, but somehow or other he managed to miss with both barrels. Then, trouble being imminent, I let drive as the beast lowered its head, and was lucky enough to break its spine (to shoot at the head of a buffalo is useless), so that it rolled over quite dead at our feet.

"You have got a magnificent pair of horns," I said, contemplating the fallen giant.

"Yes," answered Anscombe, with a twinkle of his humorous eyes, "and if it hadn't been for you I think that I should have got them in more senses than one."

As the words passed his lips some missile, from its peculiar sound I judged it was the leg off an iron pot, hurtled past my head, fired evidently from a smoothbore gun with a large charge of bad powder. Then I remembered the war-horn and all that it meant.

"Off you go," I said, "we are ambushed by Kaffirs."

We were indeed, for as we tailed down that kloof, from the top of both cliffs above us came a continuous but luckily ill-directed fire. Lead-coated stones, pot legs and bullets whirled and whistled all 'round us, yet until the last, just when we were reaching the tree to which we had tied our horses, quite harmlessly. Then suddenly I saw Anscombe begin to limp. Still we managed to run on and mount, though I observed that he did not put his right foot into the stirrup.

"What's the matter?" I asked as we galloped off.

"Shot through the instep, I think," he answered with a laugh, "but it doesn't hurt a bit."

"I expect it will later," I replied. "Meanwhile, thank God it wasn't at the top of the kloof. They won't catch us on the horses, which they never thought of killing first."

"They are going to try though. Look behind you."

I looked and saw twenty or thirty men emerging from the mouth of the kloof in pursuit.

"No time to stop to get those horns," he said with a sigh.

Then we rode on in silence, I reflecting first what a fool I had been to allow myself to be overruled by Anscombe and cross the river, and secondly not to have taken warning from that war-horn. We could not go very fast because of the difficult and swampy nature of the ground; also the great heat of the day told on the horses. Thus it came about that when we reached the ford we were not more than ten minutes ahead of our active pursuers, good runners every one of them, and accustomed to the country. I suppose that they had orders to kill or capture us at any cost, for instead of giving up the chase, as I hoped they would, they stuck to us in a surprising fashion.

We splashed through the river, and luckily on the further bank were met by Footsack who had seen us coming and guessed that something was wrong.

"Inspan!" I shouted to him. "And be quick about it if you want to see tomorrow's light. The Basutos are after us."

Off he went like a shot, his face quite green with fear.

"Now," I said to Anscombe, as we let our horses take a drink for which they were mad, "we have got to hold this ford until the wagon is ready, or those devils will get us after all. Dismount and I'll tie up the horses."

He did so with some difficulty, and at my suggestion, while I made the beasts fast, cut the lace of his boot which was full of blood, and soaked his wounded foot, that I had no time to examine, in the cool water. These things done, I helped him to the rear of a thorn tree which was thick enough to shield most of his body, and took my own

stand behind a similar thorn at a distance of a few paces. -

Presently the Basutos appeared, trotting along close together, whereon Anscombe, who was seated behind the tree, fired both barrels of his Express at them at a range of about two hundred yards. It was a foolish thing to do, first because he missed them clean, for he had over-estimated the range and the bullets went above their heads, and secondly because it caused them to scatter and made them careful, whereas had they come on in a lump we could have taught them a lesson. However I said nothing, as I knew that reproaches would only make him nervous.

Down went those scoundrels on to their hands and knees and, taking cover behind stones and bushes on the further bank, began to fire at us, for they were all armed with guns of one sort and another, and there was only about a hundred yards of water between us. As they effected this manoeuvre I am glad to say I was able to get two of them, while Anscombe, I think, wounded another.

After this our position grew quite warm, for as I have said the thorn trunks were not very broad, and three or four of the natives, who had probably been hunters, were by no means bad shots, though the rest of them fired wildly. Anscombe, in poking his head 'round the tree to shoot, had his hat knocked off by a bullet, while a slug went through the lapet of my coat.

Then a worse thing happened. Either by chance or design Anscombe's horse was struck in the neck and fell struggling, whereon my beast, growing frightened, broke its rein and galloped to the wagon. That is where I ought to have left them at first, only I thought that we might need them to make a bolt on, or to carry Anscombe if he could not walk.

Quite a long while went by before, glancing behind me, I saw that the oxen that had been grazing at a little distance had at length arrived and were being inspanned in furious haste. The Basutos saw it also, and fearing lest we should escape, determined to try to end the business.

Suddenly they leapt from their cover, and with more courage than I should have expected of them, rushed into the river proposing to storm us, which, to speak truth, I think they would have done had I not been a fairly quick shot. As it was,

finding that they were losing too heavily from our fire, they retreated in a hurry, leaving their dead behind them, and even a wounded man who was clinging to a rock. He, poor wretch, was in mortal terror lest we shoot him again, which I had not the heart to do, although as his leg was shattered above the knee by an Express bullet, it might have been true kindness. Again and again he called out for mercy, saying that he only attacked us because his chief, who had been warned of our coming, "by the white man," ordered him to take our guns and cattle.

"What white man?" I shouted. "Speak or I shoot."

There was no answer, for at this moment he fainted from loss of blood and vanished beneath the water. Then another Basuto, I suppose he was their captain but do not know, for he was hidden in some bushes, called out:

"Do not think that you shall escape, white men. There are many more of our people coming, and we will kill you in the night when you cannot see to shoot us."

At this moment, too, Footsack shouted that the wagon was inspanned and ready. Now I hesitated what to do. If we made for the wagon, which must be very slowly because of Anscombe's wounded foot, we had to cross seventy or eighty yards of rising ground almost devoid of cover. If, on the other hand, we stayed where we were till nightfall a shot might catch one of us, or other Basutos might arrive and rush us.

There was also a third possibility, that our terrified servants might trek off and leave us in order to save their own lives, which verily I believe they would have done, not being of Zulu blood. I put the problem to Anscombe, who shook his head and looked at his foot. Then he produced a lucky penny which he carried in his pocket and said:

"Let us invoke the Fates. Heads we run like heroes; tails we stay here like heroes," and he spun the penny, while I stared at him open-mouthed and not without admiration.

Never, I thought to myself, had this primitive method of cutting a Gordian knot been resorted to in such strange and urgent circumstances.

"Heads it is!" he said coolly. "Now, my

boy, do you run and I'll crawl after you. If I don't arrive, you know my people's address, and I bequeath to you all my African belongings in memory of a most pleasant trip."

"Don't play the fool," I replied sternly. "Come, put your right arm 'round my neck and hop on your left leg as you never hopped before."

Then we started, and really our transit was quite lively, for all those Basutos began what for them was rapid firing. I think, however, that their best shots must have fallen, for not a bullet touched us, although before we got out of their range one or two went very near.

"There," said Anscombe, as a last amazing hop brought him to the wagon rail, "there, you see how wise it is to give Providence a chance sometimes."

"In the shape of a lucky penny," I grumbled as I hoisted him up.

"Certainly, for why should not Providence inhabit a penny as much as it does any other mundane thing? Oh, my dear Quatermain, have you never been taught to look to the pence and let the rest take care of itself?"

"Stop talking rubbish and look to your foot, for the wagon is starting," I replied.

Then off we went at a good round trot, for never have I seen oxen more scientifically driven than they were by Footsack and his friends on this occasion, or a greater pace got out of them. As soon as we reached a fairly level piece of ground I made Anscombe lie down on the cartel of the wagon and examined his wound as well as circumstances would allow. I found that the bullet or whatever the missile may have been, had gone through his right instep just beneath the big sinew, but so far as I could judge without injuring any bone. There was nothing to be done except rub in some carbolic ointment, which fortunately he had in his medicine chest, and bind up the ugly wound as best I could with a clean handkerchief, after which I tied a towel, that was *not* clean, over the whole foot.

By this time evening was coming on, so we ate of such food as we had with us, which we needed badly enough, without stopping the wagon. I remember that it consisted of cheese and hard biscuits.

At dark we were obliged to halt a little by a stream until the moon rose, which

fortunately she did very soon, as she was only just past her full. As soon as she was up we started again, and with a breathing space or two, trekked all that night, which I spent seated on the after part of the wagon and keeping a sharp lookout, while, notwithstanding the roughness of the road and his hurt, Anscombe slept like a child upon the cartel inside.

I was very tired, so tired that the fear of surprise was the only thing that kept me awake, and I recall reflecting in a stupid kind of way, that it seemed always to have been my lot in life to watch thus in one sense or another, while others slept.

The night passed somehow without anything happening, and at dawn we halted for a while to water the oxen, which we did with buckets, and let them eat what grass they could reach from their yokes, since we did not dare to outspan them. Just as we were starting on again the voortrekker, whom I had set to watch at a little distance, ran up with his eyes bulging out of his head, and reported that he had seen a Basuto with an assegai hanging about in the bush, as if to keep touch with us, after which we delayed no more.

All that day we blundered on, thrashing the weary cattle that at every halt tried to lie down, and by nightfall came to the outspan near to the house called the Temple, where we had met the Kaffirs returning from the diamond fields. This journey we had accomplished in exactly half the time it had taken on the outward trip.

Here we were obliged to stop, as our team must have rest and food. So we outspanned and slept that night without much fear, since I thought it most improbable that the Basutos would attempt to follow us so far, as we were now within a short day's trek of Pilgrim's Rest, whither we proposed to proceed on the morrow. But that is just where I made a mistake.

CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR TODD

I DID get a little sleep that night, with one eye open, but before dawn I was up again seeing to the feeding of our remaining horse with some mealies that we carried, and other matters. The oxen could scarcely eat, and all lay down at the first opportunity.

Having awakened Footsack and the other boys that they might be ready to take advantage of the light when it came, for I was anxious to be away, I drank a nip of Hollands and water and ate a biscuit, making Anscombe do the same. Coffee would have been more acceptable, but I thought it wiser not to light a fire for fear of showing our whereabouts.

Now a faint glimmer in the east told me that the dawn was coming. Just by the wagon grew a fair-sized, green-leaved tree, and, as it was quite easy to climb even by starlight, up it I went so as to get above the ground mist and take a look 'round before we trekked.

Presently the sky grew pearly and light began to gather; then the edge of the sun appeared, throwing long level rays across the world. Everywhere the mist lay dense as cotton wool, except at one spot about a mile behind us where there was a little hill or rather a wave of the ground, over which we had trekked upon the preceding evening. The top of this rise was above the mist level, and on it no trees grew because the granite came to the surface. Having discovered nothing, I called to the boys to drive up the oxen, some of which had risen and were eating again, and prepared to descend from my tree.

As I did so, out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of something that glimmered far away, so far that it would only have attracted the notice of a trained hunter. Yes, something was shining on the brow of the rise of which I have spoken. I stared at it through my glasses and saw what I had feared to see. A body of natives was crossing the rise and the glimmer was caused by the rays of dawn striking on their spears and gun-barrels.

I came down out of that tree like a frightened wild cat and ran to the wagon, thinking hard as I went. The Basutos were after us, meaning to attack as soon as there was sufficient light. In ten minutes or less they would be here. There was no time to inspan the oxen, and even if there had been, stiff and weary as the beasts were, we should be overtaken before we had gone a hundred yards on that bad road. What then was to be done? Run for it? It was impossible, Anscombe could not run. My eye fell upon the horse munching the last of his mealies.

"Footsack," I said as quietly as I could,

"never mind about inspanning yet, but saddle up the horse. Be quick now."

He looked at me doubtfully, but obeyed, having seen nothing. If he had seen I knew that he would have been off. I nipped 'round to the end of the wagon, calling to the other two boys to let the oxen be a while and come to me.

"Now, Anscombe," I said, "hand out the rifles and cartridges. Don't stop to ask questions, but do what I tell you. They are in the rack by your side. So. Now put on your revolver and let me help you down. Man, don't forget your hat."

He obeyed quickly enough, and presently was standing on one leg by my side, looking cramped and tottery.

"The Basutos are on us," I said.

He whistled and remarked something about Chapter Number Two.

"Footsack," I called, "bring the horse here; the Baas wishes to ride a little to ease his leg."

He did so, stopping a moment to pull the second girth tight. Then we helped Anscombe into the saddle.

"Which way?" he asked.

I looked at the long slope in front of us. It was steep and bad going. Anscombe might get up it on the horse before the Kaffirs overtook us, but it was extremely problematical if we could do so. I might perhaps if I mounted behind him and the horse could bear us both, which was doubtful, but how about our poor servants? He saw the doubt upon my face and said in his quiet way:

"You may remember that our white-bearded friend told us to make straight for his place in case of any difficulty with the Basutos. It seems to have arisen."

"I know he did," I answered, "but I cannot make up my mind which is the more dangerous, Marnham or the Basutos. I rather think that he set them on to us."

"It is impossible to solve problems at this hour of the morning, Quatermain, and there is no time to toss. So I vote for the Temple."

"It seems our best chance. At any rate that's your choice, so let's go."

Then I sang out to the Kaffirs:

"The Basutos are on us. We go to Temple for refuge. Run!"

My word! They did run. I never saw athletes make better time over the first quarter of a mile. We ran, too, or at least

the horse did, I hanging on to the stirrup and Anscombe holding both the rifles beneath his arm. But the beast was tired, also blown with that morning feed of mealies, so our progress was not very fast.

When we were about two hundred yards from the wagon I looked back and saw the Basutos beginning to arrive. They saw us also, and uttering a sort of whistling war-cry, started in pursuit.

After this we had quite an interesting time. I scrambled on to the horse behind Anscombe, whereon that intelligent animal, feeling the double weight, reduced its pace proportionately, to a slow triple indeed, out of which it could not be persuaded to move. So I slipped off again over its tail and we went on as before.

Meanwhile the Basutos, very active fellows, were coming up. By this time the yellow-wood grove in the swamp, of which I have already written, was close to us, and it became quite a question which of us would get there first (I may mention that Footsack & Co. had already attained its friendly shelter). Anscombe kicked the horse with his sound heel and I thumped it with my fist, thereby persuading it to a hand gallop.

As we reached the outlying trees of the wood the first Basuto, a lank fellow with a mouth like a rat trap, arrived and threw an assegai at us which passed between Anscombe's back and my nose. Then he closed and tried to stab with another assegai. I could do nothing, but Anscombe showed himself cleverer than I expected. Dropping the reins, he drew his pistol and managed to send a bullet through that child of nature's head, so that he went down like a stone.

"And you tell me I am a bad shot," he drawled.

"It was a fluke," I gasped, for even in these circumstances truth would prevail.

"Wait and you will see," he replied, re-cocking the revolver.

As a matter of fact there was no need for more shooting, since at the verge of the swamp the Basutos pulled up. I do not think that the death of their companion caused them to do this, for they seemed to take no notice of him. It was as if they had reached some boundary which they knew it would not be lawful for them to pass. They simply stopped, took the dead man's assegai and shield from the

body and walked quietly back towards the wagon, leaving him where he lay. The horse stopped also, or rather proceeded at a walk.

"There!" exclaimed Anscombe. "Did I not tell you that I had a presentiment that I should kill a man in this accursed wood?"

"Yes," I said as soon as I had recovered my breath, "but you mixed up a woman with the matter, and I don't see one."

"That's true," he replied, "I hope we sha'n't meet her later."

Then we went on as quickly as we could, which was not very fast, for I feared lest the Basutos should change their minds and follow us. As the risk of this became less our spirits rose, since if we had lost the wagon and the oxen, at least we had saved our lives, which was almost more than we could have expected in the circumstances. At last we came to that glade where we had killed the vildebeeste not a week before. There lay its skeleton picked clean by the great brown kites that frequent the bushveld, some of which still sat about in the trees.

"Well, I suppose we must go on to Tample," said Anscombe rather faintly, for I could see that his wound was giving him a good deal of pain.

As he spoke from 'round the tree whence he had first emerged, appeared Mr. Marnham, riding the same horse and wearing the same clothes. The only difference between his two entries was that the first took place in the late evening and the second in the early morning.

"So here you are again," he said cheerfully.

"Yes," I answered, "and it is strange to meet you at the same spot. Were you expecting us?"

"Not more than I expect many things," he replied with a shrewd glance at me, adding, "I always rise with the sun, and thinking that I heard a shot fired in the distance, came to see what was happening. The Basutos attacked you at daybreak, did they not?"

"They did, but how did you know that, Mr. Marnham?"

"Your servants told me. I met them running to the house looking very frightened. You are wounded, Mr. Anscombe?"

"Yes, a couple of days ago on the border of Sekukuni's country where the natives tried to murder us."

"Ah!" he replied without surprise. "I warned you the trip was dangerous, did I not? Well, come on home, where my partner, Todd, who luckily has had some medical experience, will attend to you. Mr. Quatermain can tell me the story as we go."

So we went up on the long slope, I relating our adventures, to which Mr. Marnham listened without comment.

"I expect that the Kaffirs will have looted the wagon and be on the way home with your oxen by now," he said when I had finished.

"Are you not afraid that they will follow us here?" I asked.

"Oh no, Mr. Quatermain. We do business with these people, also they sometimes come to be doctored by Todd when they are sick, so this place is sacred ground to them. Probably they stopped hunting you when they got to the Yellow-wood swamp where our land begins, did they not?"

"Yes, but now I want to hunt them. Can you give me any help? Those oxen are tired out and footsore, so we might be able to catch them up."

He shook his head.

"We have very few people here, and by the time that you could get assistance from the camp at Barberton, if the Commandant is able and willing to give you any, which I rather doubt, they will be far away. Moreover," he added, dropping his voice, "let us come to an understanding. You are most welcome to any help or hospitality that I can offer, but if you wish to do more fighting I must ask you to go elsewhere. As I have told you, we are peaceful men who trade with these people, and do not wish to be involved in a quarrel with them, which might expose us to attack or bring us into trouble with the British Government which has annexed but not conquered their country. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly. While we are with you we will do nothing, but afterwards we hold ourselves at liberty to act as we think best."

"Quite so. Meanwhile I hope that you and Mr. Anscombe will make yourselves comfortable with us for as long as you like."

In my own mind I came to the conclusion that this would be for the shortest time possible, but I only said—

"It is most kind of you to take in complete strangers thus. No, not complete," I added, looking towards Anscombe who was following on the tired horse a few paces

behind, "for you knew his father, did you not?"

"His father?" he said, lifting his eyebrows. "No. Oh! I remember, I said something to that effect the other night, but it was a mistake. I mixed up two names, as one often does after a lapse of many years."

"I understand," I answered, but remembering Anscombe's story I reflected to myself that our venerable host was an excellent liar. Or more probably he meant to convey that he wished the subject of his youthful reminiscences to be taboo.

Just then we reached the house which had a pretty patch of well-kept flower-garden in front of it, surrounded by a fence covered with wire netting to keep out buck. By the gate squatted our three retainers, looking very blown and rather ashamed of themselves.

"Your master wishes to thank you for your help in a dark hour, Footsack, and I wish to congratulate you all upon the swiftness of your feet," I said in Dutch.

"Oh! Baas, the Basutos were many and their spears are sharp," he began apologetically.

"Be silent, you running dog," I said, "and go help your master to dismount."

Then we went through the gate, Anscombe leaning on my shoulder and on that of Mr. Marnham, and up the path which was bordered with fences of the monthly rose, towards the house. Really this was almost as charming to look at near at hand as it had been from far away. Of course the whole thing was crude in detail. Rough half-shaped blocks of marble from the neighboring quarry had been built into walls and columns. Nothing was finished, and considered bit by bit was coarse and ugly. Yet the general effect was beautiful because it was an effect of design, the picture of an artist who did not understand the technicalities of painting, the work of a writer who had no proper skill in words.

We came to the broad stoep, to which several rough blocks of marble served as steps. On it in a long chair made of native wood and seated with hide rimpis, sat or rather lolled a man in a dressing-gown who was reading a book. He raised himself as we came and the light of the sun, for the verandah faced to the east, shone full upon his face, so that I saw him well. It was that of a man of something under forty

years of age, dark, powerful, and weary—not a good face, I thought.

"Case for you, Todd," called out Marnham.

"Indeed," he answered, getting to his feet and speaking in a full voice, which, like his partner's, was that of an educated Englishman. "What's the matter. Horse accident?"

Then we were introduced, and Anscombe began to explain his injury.

"Um!" said the doctor, studying him with his dark eyes. "Kaffir bullet through the foot some days ago. Ought to be attended to at once. Also you look pretty done, so don't tire yourself with the story, which I can get from Mr. Quatermain. Come and lie down and I'll have a look at you while they are cooking breakfast."

Then he guided us to a room of which the double French windows opened on to the stoep, a very pretty room with two beds in it. Making Anscombe lie down on one of these he turned up his trouser, undid my rough bandage and examined the wound.

"Painful?" he asked.

"Very," answered Anscombe, "right up to the thigh."

After this he drew off his nether garments and made a further examination.

"Um," he said again, "I must syringe this out. Stay still while I get some stuff."

I followed him from the room, and when we were out of hearing on the stoep inquired what he thought. I did not like the look of that leg.

"It is very bad," he answered, "so bad that I am wondering if it wouldn't be best to remove the limb below the knee and make a job. You can see for yourself that it is septic and the inflammation is spreading up rapidly."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Do you fear mortification?"

He nodded.

"Can't say what was on that slug or bit of old iron, and he hasn't had the best chance since. Mortification or tetanus, or both, are more than possible. Is he a temperate man?"

"Very, so far as I know," I answered, and stared at him while he thought. Then he said with decision:

"That makes a difference. To lose a foot is a serious thing; some might think almost as bad as death. I'll give him a chance, but if those symptoms do not abate

in twenty hours, I must operate. You needn't be afraid, I was house surgeon at a London Hospital—once, and I keep my hand in. Lucky you came straight here."

Having made his preparations and washed his hands, he returned, syringed the wound with some antiseptic stuff, and dressed and bandaged the leg up to the knee. After this he gave Anscombe hot milk to drink, with two eggs broken into it, and told him to rest a while as he must not eat anything solid at present. Then he threw a blanket over him and, signing to me to come away, let down a mat over the window.

"I put a little something into that milk," he said outside, "which will send him to sleep for a few hours. So we will leave him quiet. Now you'll want a wash."

"Where are you going to take Mr. Quatermain?" asked Marnham who was seated on the stoep.

"Into my room," he answered.

"Why? There's Heda's ready."

"Heda might return at any moment," replied the doctor. "Also Mr. Quatermain had better sleep in Mr. Anscombe's room. He will very likely want some one to look after him at night."

Marnham opened his mouth to speak again, then changed his mind and was silent, as a servant is silent under rebuke. The incident was quite trifling, yet it revealed to me the relative attitude of these two men. Without a doubt Todd was the master of his partner, who did not even care to dispute with him about the matter of the use of his daughter's bedroom.

Well, I went to tidy up in the doctor's room, and as he left me alone while I washed, had the opportunity of studying it a little. Like the rest of the house it was lined with native wood which was made to serve as the backs of bookshelves and of cupboards filled with medicines and instruments.

The books formed a queer collection. There were medical works, philosophical works, histories, novels, most of them French, and other volumes of a sort that I imagine are generally kept under lock and key; also some that had to do with occult matters. There was even a Bible. I opened it thoughtlessly, half in idle curiosity, to see whether it was ever used, only to replace it in haste. For at the very page that my eye fell on, I remember it was one of my favorite chapters in Isaiah, was

a stamp in violet ink marked H. M.'s Prison—well, I won't say where. I may state, however, that the clue enabled me in after years to learn an episode in this man's life which had brought about his ruin. There is no need to repeat it or to say more than that gambling and an evil use of his medical knowledge to provide the money to pay his debts, were the cause of his fall.

The strange thing is that he should ever have kept the book which had probably been given to him by the prison chaplain. Still everybody makes mistakes sometimes. Or it may have had associations for him, and of course he had never seen this stamp upon an unread page, which happened to leap to my eye.

Now I was able to make a shrewd guess at his later career. After his trouble he had emigrated and began to practise in South Africa. Somehow his identity had been discovered; his past was dragged up against him, possibly by rivals jealous of his skill; his business went and he found it advisable to retire to the Transvaal before the annexation, at that time the home of sundry people of broken reputations. Even there he did not stop in a town, but hid himself upon the edge of savagery.

Here he foregathered with another man of queer character, Marnham, and in his company entered upon some doubtful but lucrative form of trade while still indulging his love of medicine by doctoring and operating upon natives, over whom he would in this way acquire great influence. Indeed, as I discovered before the day was over, he had quite a little hospital at the back of the house in which were four or five beds occupied by Kaffirs and served by two native nurses whom he had trained. Also numbers of out-patients visited him, some of whom traveled from great distances and occasionally, but not often, he attended white people who chanced to be in the neighborhood.

The three of us breakfasted in a really charming room from the window of which could be studied a view as beautiful as any I know. The Kaffirs who waited were well trained and dressed in neat linen uniforms. The cooking was good; there was real silver on the table, then a strange sight in that part of Africa, and amongst engravings and other pictures upon the walls, hung an oil portrait of a very beautiful young woman with dark hair and eyes.

"Is that your daughter, Mr. Marnham?" I asked.

"No," he replied rather shortly, "it is her mother."

Immediately afterward he was called from the room to speak to some one, whereon the doctor said—

"A foreigner as you see, a Hungarian; the Hungarian women are very good-looking and very charming."

"So I have understood," I answered, "but does this lady live here?"

"Oh, no. She is dead, or I believe that she is dead. I am not sure, because I make it a rule never to pry into people's private affairs. All I know about her is that she was a beauty whom Marnham married late in life upon the Continent when she was but eighteen. As is common in such cases he was very jealous of her, but it didn't last long, as she died, or I understand that she died, within a year of her daughter's birth. The loss affected him so much that he emigrated to South Africa with the child and began life anew. I do not think that they correspond with Hungary, and he never speaks of her even to his daughter, which suggests that she is dead."

I reflected that all these circumstances might equally well suggest several other things, but said nothing, thinking it wisest not to pursue the subject. Presently Marnham returned and informed me that a native had just brought him word that the Basutos had made off homeward with our cattle, but had left the wagon and its contents quite untouched, not even stealing the spare guns and ammunition.

"That's luck," I said, astonished, "but extremely strange. How do you explain it, Mr. Marnham?"

He shrugged his shoulders and answered—

"As every one knows, you are a much greater expert in native habits and customs than I am, Mr. Quatermain."

"There are only two things that I can think of," I said. "One is that for some reason or other they thought the wagon *tagati*, bewitched you know, and that it would bring evil on them to touch it, though this did not apply to the oxen. The other is that they supposed it, but not the oxen, to belong to some friend of their own whose property they did not wish to injure."

He looked at me sharply but said nothing, and I went on to tell them the details of the

attack that had been made upon us, adding—

"The odd part of the affair is that one of those Basutos called out to us that some infernal scoundrel of a white man had warned Sekukuni of our coming and that he had ordered them to take our guns and cattle. This Basuto, who was wounded and praying for mercy, was drowned before he could tell me who the white man was."

"A Boer, I expect," said Marnham quietly. "As you know they are not particularly well affected towards us English just now. Also I happen to be aware that some of them are intriguing with him against the British through Makurupiji, his 'Mouth' or prime-minister, a very clever old scamp who likes to have two stools to sit on."

"And doubtless will end by falling between them. Well, you see, now that I think of it, the wounded Kaffir only said that they were ordered to take our guns and oxen, and incidentally our lives. The wagon was not mentioned."

"Quite so, Mr. Quatermain. I will send some of our boys to help your servants to bring everything it contains up here."

"Can't you lend me a team of oxen," I asked, "to drag it to the house?"

"No, we have nothing but young cattle left. Both red-water and lung-sickness have been so bad this season that all the oxen have been swept out of the country. I doubt whether you could beg, borrow or steal a team of oxen this side of Pretoria, except from some of the Dutchmen who won't part."

"That's awkward. I hoped to be able to trek in a day or two."

"Your friend won't be able to trek for a good many days at the best," broke in the doctor, who had been listening unconcernedly, "but of course you could get away on the horse after it has rested."

"You told me you left a span of oxen at Pretoria," said Marnham. "Why not go and fetch them here, or if you don't like to leave Mr. Anscombe, send your driver and the boys."

"Thanks for the idea. I will think it over," I answered.

That morning after Footsack and the Voorlooper had been sent with some of the servants from the Temple to fetch up the contents of the wagon, for I was too tired to accompany them, having found that

Anscombe was still asleep, I determined to follow his example. Finding a long chair on the stoep, I sat down and slumbered in it sweetly for hours.

I dreamt all sorts of things, then through my dreams it seemed to me that I heard two voices talking, those of our hosts, Marnham and Todd, not on the stoep, but at a distance from it. As a matter of fact they were talking, but so far away that in my ordinary waking state I could never have heard them. My own belief is that the senses, and I may add the semi-spiritual part of us, are much more acute when we lie half bound in the bonds of sleep, than when we are what is called wide awake.

In this curious condition of mind it seemed to me that Todd said to Marnham—

"Why have you brought these men here?"

"I did not bring them here," he answered. "Luck, Fate, Fortune, God or the devil, call it what you will, brought them here, though if you had had your wish, it is true they would never have come. Still, as they have come, I am glad. It is something to me, living in this hell, to get a chance of talking to English gentlemen again before I die."

"English gentlemen," remarked Todd reflectively. "Well, Anscombe is of course, but how about that old hunter? After all, in what way is he better than the scores of other hunters and Kaffir traders and wanderers whom one meets in this strange land?"

"In what way indeed?" thought I to myself, in my dream.

"If you can't see, I can't explain to you. But as I happen to know, the man is of blood as good as mine and a great deal better than yours," he added with a touch of insolence. "Moreover, he has an honest name among white and black, which is much in this country."

"Yes," replied the doctor in the same reflective voice, "I agree with you, I let him pass as a gentleman. But I repeat, Why did you bring them here when with one more word it would have been so easy——"

"I have told you, it was not I. What are you driving at?"

"Do you think it is exactly convenient, especially now when we are under the British flag again, to have two people who, we both admit, are English gentlemen, that is, clean, clear-eyed men, considering us

and our affairs for an indefinite period, just because you wish for the pleasure of their society? Would it not have been better to tell those Basutos to let them trek on to Pretoria?"

"I don't know what would have been better. I repeat, what are you driving at?"

"Heda is coming home in a day or two; she might be here any time," remarked Todd as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Yes, because you made me write and say that I wanted her. But what of that?"

"Nothing in particular, except that I am not sure that I wish her to associate with 'an English gentleman' like this Anscombe."

Marnham laughed scornfully.

"Ah! I understand," he said. "Too clean and straight. Complications might ensue and the rest of it. Well, I wish to God they would, for I know the Anscombes, or used to, and I know the genus called Todd."

"Don't be insulting; you may carry the thing too far one day, and whatever I have done I have paid for. But you have not paid—yet."

"The man is very ill. You are a skilled doctor. If you are afraid of him, why don't you kill him?" asked Marnham with bitter scorn.

"There you have me," replied Todd. "Men may shed much, but most of them never shed their professional honor. I shall do my honest best to cure Mr. Anscombe, and I tell you that he will take some curing."

Then I woke up, and as no one was in sight, wondered whether or no I had been dreaming. The upshot of it was that I made up my mind to send Footsack to Pretoria for the oxen, not to go myself.

CHAPTER V

A GAME OF CARDS

I SLEPT in Anscombe's room that night and looked after him. He was very feverish and the pain in his leg kept him awake a good deal. He told me that he couldn't bear Dr. Todd and wished to get away at once. I had to explain to him that this was impossible until his spare oxen arrived which I was going to send for to Pretoria, but of other matters including

that of the dangerous state of his foot, I said nothing.

Before breakfast time, just as I had finished dressing myself in some of the clean things which had been brought from the wagon, Todd came and made a thorough and business-like examination of his patient, while I awaited the result with anxiety on the stoep. At length he appeared and said:

"Well, I think that we shall be able to save the foot, though I can't be quite sure for another twenty-four hours. The worst symptoms have abated and his temperature is down by two degrees. Anyway he will have to stay in bed and live on light food till it is normal, after which he might lie in a long chair on the stoep. On no account must he attempt to stand."

I thanked him for his information heartily enough and asked him if he knew where Marnham was, as I wanted to speak to him with reference to the despatch of Footsack to fetch the oxen from Pretoria.

"Not up yet, I think," he answered. "I fancy that yesterday was one of his 'wet' nights, excitement of meeting strangers and so on."

"Wet nights?" I queried, wishing for a clearer explanation.

"Yes, he is a grand old fellow, one of the best, but like most other people he has his little weaknesses, and when the fit is on him he can put away a surprising amount of liquor. I tell you so that you should not be astonished if you notice anything, or try to argue with him when he is in that state, as then his temper is apt to be—well, lively. Now I must go and give him a pint of warm milk; that is his favorite antidote, and in fact the best there is."

I thought to myself that we had struck a nice establishment in which to be tied, literally by the leg, for an indefinite period. I was not particularly flush at the time, but I know I would have paid £100 to be out of it: before the end I should have been glad to throw in everything that I had. But mercifully that was hidden from me.

Todd and I breakfasted together and discoursed of Kaffir customs, as to which he was singularly well informed. Then I accompanied him to see his native patients in the little hospital of which I have spoken.

Believing the man to be a thorough scamp as I did, it was astonishing to me to note how gentle and forbearing he was to these

people. Of his skill I need say nothing, as that was evident. He was going to perform an internal operation upon a burly old savage, rather a serious one I believe; at any rate it necessitated chloroform. So I left him boiling his instruments and putting on what looked like a clean night-gown over his clothes, and returned to the stoep.

Here I found Marnham, whose eyes were rather bloodshot, though otherwise, except for a shaky hand, he seemed right enough. He murmured something about having overslept himself and inquired very politely, for his manners were beautiful, after Anscombe and as to whether we were quite comfortable, and so forth.

After this I consulted him as to the best road for our servants to travel by to Pretoria, and later on despatched them, giving Footsack various notes to ensure the delivery of the oxen to him. Also I gave him some money to pay for their keep and told him with many threats to get back with the beasts as quick as he could travel. Then I sent him and the two other boys off, not without misgivings, although he was an experienced man in his way and promised faithfully to fulfil every injunction to the letter. To me he seemed so curiously glad to go that I inquired the reason, since after a journey like ours, it would have been more natural if he had wished to rest.

"Oh! Baas," he said, "I don't think this Tampel very healthy for colored people. I am told of some who have died here. That man Karl who gave me the diamond, I think he must have died, at least I saw his spook last night standing over me and shaking his head, and the boys saw it too."

"Oh, be off with your talk of spooks," I said, "and come back quickly with those oxen, or I promise you that you will die and be a spook yourself."

"I will, Baas, I will!" he ejaculated and departed almost at a run, leaving me rather uncomfortable.

I believed nothing of the tale of the spook of Karl, but I saw that Footsack believed in it, and was afraid lest he might be thereby prevented from returning. I would much rather have gone myself, but it was impossible for me to leave Anscombe so ill in the hands of our strange hosts.

As I walked back to the house, having parted from Footsack on the top of a neighboring ridge whence I could point out

his path to him, I met Marnham riding away. He pulled up and said that he was going down to the Granite stream to arrange about setting some one to watch our wagon. I expressed sorrow that he should have the trouble, which should have been mine if I could have got away, whereon he answered that he was glad of the opportunity for a ride, as it was something to do.

"How do you fill in your time here," I asked carelessly, "as you don't farm?"

"Oh, by trading," he replied, and with a nod set his horse to a canter.

A queer sort of trading, thought I to myself, where there is no store. Now what exactly does he trade in, I wonder.

As it happened, I was destined to find out before I was an hour older. Having given Anscombe a look and found that he was comfortable, I thought that I would inspect the quarry whence the marble came of which the house was built, as it had occurred to me that if there was plenty of it it might be worth exploiting some time in the future. It had been pointed out to me where it was among some thorns in a gully that ran at right angles to the main kloof not more than a few hundred yards from the house.

Following a path over which the stones had been dragged originally, I came to the spot and discovered that quite a little hole had been quarried in what seemed to me to be a positive mountain of pure white marble. I examined the place as thoroughly as I could, climbing among some bushes that grew in surface earth that had been washed down from the top, in order to do so.

At the back of these bushes there was a hole large enough for a man to creep through. I crept through with the object of ascertaining whether the marble veins continued.

To my surprise I found a stout yellow-wood door within five feet of the mouth of the hole. Reflecting that no doubt it was here that the quarrymen kept, or had kept their tools and explosives, I gave it a push. I suppose that it had been left unfastened accidentally, or that something had gone wrong with the lock; at any rate it swung open. Pursuing my researches as to the depth of the marble, I advanced boldly and, as the place was dark, struck a match.

Evidently the marble did continue, as I could see by the glittering roof of a

cavern, for such it was. But the floor attracted my attention as well as the roof, for on it were numerous long cases not unlike coffins bearing the stamp of a well-known Birmingham firm, labeled "fencing iron" and addressed to Messrs. Marnham & Todd, Transvaal, *via* Delagoa Bay.

I knew at once what they were, having seen the like before, but if any doubt remained in my mind it was easy to solve, for as it chanced one of the cases was open and half emptied. I slipped my hand into it. As I thought, it contained the ordinary Kaffir gun of commerce, cost delivered in Africa, say 35s.; cost delivered to native chief in cash or cattle, say £10, which, when the market is eager, allows for a decent profit.

Contemplating those cases, the survivors probably of a much larger stock, I understood how it came about that Sekukuni had dared to show fight against the Government. Doubtless it was hence that the guns had come which sent a bullet through Anscombe's foot and nearly polished off both of us.

Moreover, as further matches showed me, that cave contained other stores—item, kegs of gunpowder; item, casks of cheap spirit; item, bars of lead, also a box marked bullet moulds and another marked percussion caps. I think, too, there were some innocent bags full of beads and a few packages of Birmingham-made assegai blades. There may have been other things, but if so I did not wait to investigate them.

Gathering up the ends of my burnt matches and, in case there should be any dust in the place that would show foot-marks, flapping the stone floor behind me with my pocket handkerchief, I retired and continued my investigations of that wonderful marble deposit from the bottom of the quarry, to which, having re-arranged the bushes, I descended by another route, leaping like a buck from stone to stone.

It was just as well that I did so, for a few minutes later Dr. Todd appeared.

"Made a good job of your operation?" I asked cheerfully.

"Pretty fair, thanks," he answered, "although that old Kaffir tried to brain the nurse when he was coming out of the anesthetic. But are you interested in geology?"

"A little," I replied, "that is if there is any chance of making money out of it,

which there ought to be here, as this marble looks almost as good as that of Carrara. But flint instruments are more my line, that is, in an ignorant and amateur way, as I think they are in yours, for I saw some in your room. Tell me, what do you think of this. Is it a scraper?" and I produced a stone out of my pocket which I had found a week before in the bush-veld.

At once he forgot his suspicions, of which I could see he arrived very full indeed. This curious man, as it happened, was really fond of flint instruments of which he knew a great deal.

"Did you find this here?" he asked.

I led him several yards further from the mouth of the cave and pointed out the exact spot where I said I had picked it up amongst some quarry débris. Then followed a most learned discussion, for it appeared that this was a flint instrument of the rarest and most valuable type, one that Noah might have used, or Job might have scraped himself with, and the question was how the dickens had it come among that quarry débris. In the end we left the problem undecided, and having presented the article to Dr. Todd, a gift for which he thanked me with real warmth, I returned to the house, filled with the glow that rewards one who has made a valuable discovery.



OF THE following three days I have nothing particular to say, except that during them I was perhaps more acutely bored than ever I had been in my life before. The house was beautiful in its own fashion; the food was excellent; there was everything I could want to drink, and Todd announced that he no longer feared the necessity of operation upon Anscombe's leg. His recovery was now a mere matter of time, and meanwhile he must not use his foot or even let the blood run into it more than could be helped, which meant that he must keep himself in a recumbent position.

The trouble was that I had nothing on earth to do except study the characters of our hosts, which I found disagreeable and depressing. I might have gone out shooting, but nothing of the sort was allowed upon the property in obedience to the wish of Miss Heda, a mysterious young person who was always expected and never appeared, and beyond it I was afraid to

travel for fear of the Basutos. I might have gone to Pilgrim's Rest or Lydenburg to make report of the nefarious deeds of the said Basutos, but at best this would have taken one or two days, and possibly I should have been detained by officials who never consider any one's time except their own.

This meant that I should have been obliged to leave Anscombe alone, which I did not wish to do, so I just sat still and, as I have said, was intensely bored, hanging about the place and smoking more than was good for me.

In due course Anscombe emerged on to the stoep, where he lay with his leg up, and was also bored, especially after he had tried to pump old Marnham about his past in the Guards and completely failed. It was in this mood of utter dejection that we agreed to play a game of cards one evening. Not that either of us cared for cards; indeed, personally, I have always detested them because, with various-colored counters to represent money which never passed, they had formed one of the afflictions of my youth. Never in any aspect of life have I cared for fooling. Anscombe also disliked cards, I think because his ancestors too had played with counters, such as some that I have seen belonging to the Cocoa-Tree Club and other gambling places of a past generation, marked as high as a thousand guineas, which counters must next morning be redeemed in hard cash, whereby his family had been not a little impoverished.

"I fancy you will find they are high-fliers," he said when the pair had left to fetch a suitable table, for the night being very hot we were going to play on the stoep by the light of the hanging paraffin lamp and some candles. I replied to the effect that I could not afford to lose large sums of money, especially to men who for aught I knew might then be engaged in marking the cards.

"I understand," he answered. "Don't you bother about that. This is my affair, arranged for my special amusement. I sha'n't grumble if the fun costs something, for I am sure there will be fun."

"All right," I said, "only if we should happen to win money, it's yours, not mine."

Only to myself I reflected, however, that with these two opponents we had about

as much chance of winning as a snowflake has of resisting the atmosphere of the lower regions.

Presently they returned with the table, which had a green cloth over it that hung down half-way to the ground. Also one of the native boys brought a tray with spirits, from which I judged by various signs, old Marnham, who had already drunk his share at dinner, had helped himself freely on the way. Soon we were arranged, Anscombe, who was to be my partner, opposite to me in his long chair, and the game began.

I forget what particular variant of cards it was we played, though I know it admitted of high and progressive stakes. At first, however, these were quite moderate and we won, as I suppose we were meant to do. After half an hour or so Marnham rose to help himself to brandy, a great deal of brandy and very little water, while I took a nip of Hollands, and Anscombe and Todd filled their pipes.

"I think this is getting rather slow," said Todd to Anscombe. "I vote we put a bit more on."

"As much as you like," answered Anscombe with a little drawl and twinkle of the eye, which always showed that he was amused. "Both Quatermain and I are born gamblers. Don't look angry, Quatermain, you know you are. Only if we lose you will have to take a check, for I have precious little cash."

"I think that will be good enough," replied the doctor quietly, "if you lose."

So the stakes were increased to an amount that made my hair stand up stiffer even than usual, and the game went on.

Behold! A marvel came to pass. How it happened I do not know, unless Marnham had brought the wrong cards by mistake or had grown too fuddled to understand his partner's telegraphic signals, which I, being accustomed to observe, saw him make, not once but often, still we won! What is more, with a few set-backs, we went on winning, till presently the sums written down to our credit, for no actual cash passed, were considerable.

And all the while, at the end of each bout Marnham helped himself to more brandy, while the doctor grew more mad in a suppressed-thunder kind of a way. For my part I became alarmed, especially as I per-

ceived that Anscombe was on the verge of breaking into open merriment, and his legs being up I could not kick him under the table.

"My partner ought to go to bed. Don't you think we should stop?" I said.

"On the whole I do," replied Todd, glowering at Marnham, who, somewhat unsteadily, was engaged in wiping drops of brandy from his long beard.

"— if I do," exclaimed that worthy. "When I was young and played with gentlemen they always gave losers an opportunity of revenge."

"Then," replied Anscombe with a flash of his eyes, "let us try to follow in the footsteps of the gentlemen with whom you played in your youth. I suggest that we double the stakes."

"That's right! That's the old form!" said Marnham.

The doctor half rose from his chair, then sat down again. Watching him, I concluded that he believed his partner, a seasoned vessel, was not so drunk as he pretended to be, and either in an actual or a figurative sense, had a card up his sleeve. If so, it remained there, for again we won; all the luck was with us.

"I am getting tired," drawled Anscombe. "Lemon and water are not sustaining. Shall we stop?"

"By Heaven—no!" shouted Marnham, to which Anscombe replied that if it was wished, he would play another hand, but no more.

"All right," said Marnham, "but let it be for double or quits."

He spoke quite quietly and seemed suddenly to have grown sober. Now I think that Todd made up his mind that he really was acting and that he really had that card up his sleeve. At any rate he did not object. I, however, was of a different opinion, having often seen drunken men succumb to an *accès* of sobriety under the stress of excitement and remarked that it did not last long.

"Do you really mean that?" I said, speaking for the first time and addressing myself to the doctor. "I don't quite know what the sum involved is, but it must be large."

"Of course," he answered.

Then remembering that at the worst Anscombe stood to lose nothing, I shrugged my shoulders and held my tongue. It was

Marnham's deal, and although he was somewhat in the shadow of the hanging lamp and the candles had guttered out, I distinctly saw him play some hocus-pocus with the cards, but in the circumstances made no protest. As it chanced he must have hocus-pocused them wrong, for though his hand was full of trumps, Todd held nothing at all. The battle that ensued was quite exciting, but the end of it was that an ace in the hand of Anscombe, who really was quite a good player, did the business, and we won again.

In the rather awful silence that followed Anscombe remarked in his cheerful drawl—

"I'm not sure that my addition is quite right; we'll check that in the morning, but I make out that you two gentlemen owe Quatermain and myself £749 10s."

Then the doctor broke out.

"You accursed old fool," he hissed—there is no other word for it—at Marnham. "How are you going to pay all this money that you have gambled away, drunken beast that you are!"

"Easily enough, you felon," shouted Marnham. "So," and thrusting his hand into his pocket he pulled out a number of uncut diamonds which he threw upon the table, adding "there's what will cover it twice over, and there are more where they

came from, as you know well enough, my medical jailbird."

"You dare to call me that," gasped the doctor in a voice laden with fury, so intense that it had deprived him of his reason, "you—you—murderer! Oh, why don't I kill you as I shall some day?" and lifting his glass, which was half full, he threw the contents into Marnham's face.

"That's a nice man for a prospective son-in-law, isn't he?" exclaimed the old scamp, as, seizing the brandy decanter, he hurled it straight at Todd's head, only missing him by an inch.

"Don't you think you had both better go to bed, gentlemen?" I inquired. "You are saying things you might regret in the morning."

Apparently they did think it, for without another word they rose and marched off in different directions to their respective rooms, which I heard both of them lock. For my part I collected the I.O.U.'s; also the diamonds which still lay upon the table, while Anscombe examined the cards.

"Marked, by Jove!" he said. "Oh, my dear Quatermain, never have I had such an amusing evening in all my life."

"Shut up, you silly fool," I answered. "There'll be murder done over this business, and I only hope it won't be on us."

TO BE CONTINUED

AFRICAN SURGERY

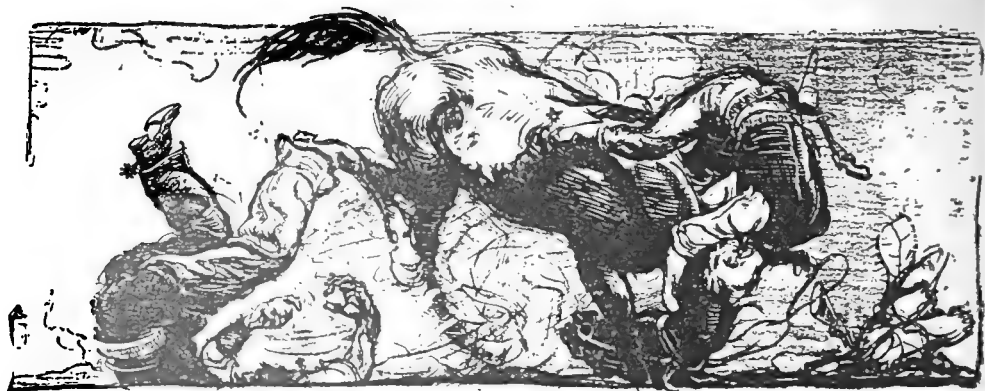
By

MAJOR W. ROBERT FORAN

SWORD slashes and spear stabs are sewn up among the Akikuyu with no regard to drainage, yet often heal wonderfully well. One or more strong thorns are passed through the skin and muscular tissue well back from the border of the wound, and similarly out through the skin on the opposite side. The path for the thorn is made by means of a sharp awl.

A stitch of tough vegetable fiber is then

passed externally, in the form of a figure eight, around the projecting extremities of the thorns. The surfaces of the wound are thus brought fairly well together and maintained so. The edges of the wounded skin are then similarly treated, bored with the awl, and brought neatly together by means of a series of closely set separate stitches, each tied with a reed knot. Should the patient recover, the result is quite neat.



THE CURSE OF GOLD

by W.C. TUTTLE

Author of "Magpie's Nightbear," "All Wool," etc.

BEIN' uh sheriff," remarks Magpie Simpkins, rubbin' his whiskers with th' palm of his hand, and kickin' some books off th' table so he can rest his boots, "gives uh feller lots uh prominence in th' community. It sort a makes people look up to him with respect."

I recognizes th' sarcastic tone of his voice and I also recognizes them words, bein' as I spoke them to him about uh month before th' county election. I don't make no response; jist eases myself into uh chair and pe-ruses uh reward notice on th' wall.

"People jist sort a fear him, too," he continues. "Ain't it funny what uh real nice time uh sheriff has, Ike?"

"Referrin' to th' deputation of prominent citizens I sees amblin' away from here uh while ago?" I asks.

"Uh-ha," sez he. "That's th' 'What For' committee."

"What for?"

"Su'pression uh crime, Ike. Them jaspers opine that I'm too diligent around town and don't clean up th' county fast enough. They wants to know what for. They kindly points out th' error of my ways and orates collectively and individually that 'as uh sheriff I ain't showin' no pay-streak.'"

"As uh horrible example of what I ain't done they points out that th' Evans gang

is still liftin' cows without uh pang of remorse, and that th' Piegan Kid ain't no-ways ceased his operations since th' star begins to shine on my manly bosom. They also points out that any day th' Kid is liable to hanker fer th' cash in our new Cattlemen's bank, and they opine that I'd better put th' runnin' iron on him before he invades our peaceful domain."

"What you needs," sez I, "is more dignity, Magpie. If I was sheriff and uh bunch uh mavericks like that tried to stampe me I'd——"

"Ike." Magpie rises to his six-feet-six and rests his elbows on top of th' window-sill. "I ain't no-ways partial to receivin' advice today. I've got more than I can pack, and th' next hombre what sez, 'If I was sheriff' is shore goin' to git this nice li'l silver star shoved down crossways in his throat. Sabe? I may not be uh hi-yu example as uh peace officer but I'll tell yuh——"

Came uh rattle uh pistol-shots out in th' street and th' next thing we knowed our li'l shack tried to break loose from th' foundation. I hears th' porch go smash and uh big framed pitcher of Roosevelt fell off th' wall, and th' next thing I knowed I was lookin' through that frame instead of Teddy, and uh piece uh that glass went plumb down to my belt-line inside my shirt and punched holes in my backbone all th' way down.

Magpie jerked th' door open so we could see, and there was th' Piegan Kid on his roan hoss out in th' middle of th' street.

"Th' bronk is plumb scared of James Wilson Spreckles, th' cashier of th' Cattlemen's bank, who has got his face and one arm out of th' bank door and is pollutin' th' atmosphere with smoke from uh nice li'l .32 pistol.

Th' Kid is havin' uh hard time tryin' to hang on to two sacks and handle his rifle at th' same time. His bronk has done bucked across our front porch, and th' two props are squewgeed and th' roof is saggin' more all th' time.

Magpie sized up th' situation and then unlimbers with his .45. I reckon all would have been well, but jist as Magpie unhooks that ol' gun th' roof of th' porch heeds th' call of gravity and comes down in uh heap. Also th' cashier has one more ca'tridge in his salute-box and he proceeds to slam that bullet into th' door-jamb next to Magpie's face.

As uh result th' Kid fogs out a town and Magpie does uh Cree war dance around th' office, yellin' fer me to git some tweezers so he can git th' splinters out of his eyes. That cashier don't know yet how close he comes to makin' uh clean hit.

I never did like James W. In fact I don't like no man what has uh middle name and uses it, and that goes double fer uh jasper who uses his middle name and perfume, too. I can describe him to anybody who lives here by sayin' that he packs uh silk handkerchief, with uh pink border, polluted with perfume, and rides with short stirrups. *Sabe?* He jist didn't belong a-tall.

"I deputizes you to help me, Ike," states Magpie, after we gits most of th' white pine out of his features. "Go git uh hoss and come back quick. I've got rifles fer two. Git a goin', Ike, 'cause me and you are goin' to make th' Kid hard to catch."



MAGPIE ducks out of th' back door, where he keeps his buck-skin hoss, and I goes out into th' street. There don't seem to be no excitement. Uh few shots in Piperock don't cause no riots, 'cause most every day somebody takes exceptions to uh cat or uh dog or mebby jist uh Greaser.

I starts to walk around th' corner to see if I can locate uh hoss, when here comes Magpie on his bronk, with uh rifle in each hand.

"How much did he git?" yells Magpie at James W., who is still on th' bank steps with his terrible weapon.

He waves his arms and yells somethin', and Magpie nods and rides up on th' lope.

"What did he say?" I asks.

"Couldn't understand uh word he said. Here's yore rifle, Ike. If I was you I'd take that pitcher-frame off my neck. It don't fit like it was made fer yuh. Git uh hoss and trail me out toward th' Sentinel butte."

He spurs his hoss down th' street, while I climbs out uh that frame and heads fer th' hitch-rack.

There's only one hoss there, uh brown mare belongin' to Art Miller, so I eases into th' saddle and points down th' street. I reckon that bronk hadn't hit th' ground more than three times before I hears Art yell—

"Where yuh goin' with that hoss?"

"I'm takin' her in th' name of th' law!" I yells back, diggin' her with my heels, and we sails fer th' aidge of town sort uh freelike.

That mare shore could run. I reckon she could start at th' gun and beat th' echo out uh range 'cause jist as we turned th' corner my hat was lifted off and I hears uh sort uh "*flut, flut!*" like uh lead bullet annihilatin' space, but we're goin' so fast I don't hear th' report.

After keepin' up that pace fer about three miles my back began to pain me somethin' awful. Every time that bronk hit th' ground it hurt me. I stands it as long as I can and then gits off and takes off my shirt.

I heaves that piece uh glass far out into th' desert, replaces my shirt and overhauls Magpie about three miles further on.

"He's shore throwin' leather into his hoss," grunts Magpie, as I ranges alongside uh him. "I seen him uh while ago and he shore was movin'."

We lopes along th' Kid's trail, which is uh heap easy to foller except that ankle-deep sand ain't what you'd pick fer uh fast track.

We breezes along fer uh spell, and all to once th' bronks shied wide and we pulls up.

It's th' Kid's hoss down and out. I reckon it steps into uh hole and breaks its leg. Anyway, there it is with uh hole drilled in it's head, still wearin' th' Kid's silver-mounted saddle and th' silver-girt leg-bit.

"Here's where we waltzes to slow music," states Magpie. "We'll leave our bronks here and take a *pasear* on foot."

I spots th' Kid's tracks where he pilgrims off up th' side of th' butte, and points 'em out to Magpie.

"Ike," sez he, "you circle th' hill, keepin' yore worthless head below th' tops of th' mesquite, and come up th' other side. I'll ease my carcass up this side and we'll surround th' Kid. Don't ask questions if yuh see him, Ike. Shoot first and ask afterward 'cause th' Kid is mighty previous on th' trigger."

We drops our reins and separates. By th' great horned toad! I wasn't born to be uh man-hunter and I ain't nowadays what you'd call nervy. I've been shot at uh plenty out in th' open, but this Injun stuff in th' brush don't appeal to me a-tall.

Once durin' that sneak uh long, hungry jackrabbit lopes out of uh mesquite bush beside me, makin' me grow suddenly so danged thin that my belt jist natcherally slips down around my feet, and I has uh hard time tryin' to untangle my stummick from around my vocal cords.

Anyway, I ambles on and finally gits to th' top of th' ridge. There's uh big wash-out at th' top, all fringed with mesquite. I sees that there ain't nothin' between me and that brush so I starts over to have uh look at th' washout.

I didn't go over there, for th' simple reason that jist as I starts uh bullet burnt right across th' place where uh shippin' clerk carries his pencil and it raised uh blister on my ear. Th' next bullet lifts three .45-.90 ca'tridges out of my belt, one of which exploded with great cheer.

Nobody can ever say that Ike Harper can't take uh hint. Say, if anythin' ever hugged th' ground harder than I did it never came loose.

Pretty soon I hears Magpie's ol' Winchester shakin' th' hills and another of about th' same caliber talkin' back from some place in th' mesquite ahead uh me.

I forgits my lesson and crawls forward for fifty feet or so. Pretty soon I sees uh man and I unhooks that ol' .45-.90. I gits in two shots before uh bullet sticks its nose in th' ground in front of me and fills my eyes plumb full uh sand.

I rolls over in th' brush and paws th' sand out of my eyes, and then finds out that I had been shootin' at uh hat on uh stick. All this time there's plenty uh fire-works goin' on and I'm anxious to git back

on th' firin'-line. I eases myself out of th' brush and gits ready again.

Bing! Uh bullet jams into an ol' mesquite stalk beside me and another sings sweetly past my ear and I replies in th' general direction from whence they came.

For th' next few minutes she's uh rip-bang proposition. I shoots at everything until that ol' gun is hotter than blazes. I reckon I kept that brush so full uh lead that th' Kid don't have uh chance to line his sights on me, 'cause his nearest shot only cuts my hip-pocket where it bulges with my chewin' tobacco, and th' next nearest drills my canteen.

Pretty soon I gits uh ca'tridge stuck in that gun and I has to use uh pocket-knife and uh lot of profanity in order to git a-goin' again.

By th' time I gits it fixed there ain't no more shootin' goin' on so I takes uh chew and settles down to wait him out.

I reckon it's about ten minutes later that I glimpses uh human bein' easin' itself out of th' very mesquite I've been sprayin' with lead, and I shoots quick. Said human flops and I sees uh boot wave in th' air as its owner upends and slides down into th' wash-out.

"Well," sez I to myself, "with me on th' force this ain't no healthy climate fer out-laws. When Ike Harper gits on their trail—aw revoir."

I fills my rifle again and sa'nters over to th' washout. Pushin' th' brush to one side I looks down at th' carcass of—Magpie Simpkins!

• Honest to grandma, that's who it was. Th' sheriff of Yaller Rock county is reposin' his entire length down th' side of th' wash-out, with his face stuck in th' crown of his hat and his rifle is balancin' across th' back of his neck, as if it was weighin' its owner's chances.

"Magpie," sez I, sort a foolishlike, "yore deputy shot first and there ain't no questions to be asked." But Magpie don't move a-tall.

I slides down and turns him over. I know uh dead man when I sees one and Magpie shore comes up to requirements.

I sits down to roll uh smoke, I'm that overcome. By golly! I shore am sorry but that don't help none. Me and Magpie have been pardners ever since th' Sentinel Butte was uh water-hole, and I can't help feelin' sorry that he's done left this vale

uh tears. I can't find my cigarette papers so I digs into poor Magpie's vest to find his, and I gits th' shock of my life.

"There in — my — shirt pocket, Ike," mumbles Magpie, sittin' up like uh mechanical toy and swingin' his long legs around so he's facin' down hill. "I been tryin' to say somethin' fer some time," sez he sort a weak like, "but I reckon th' Kid's last bullet creased me so close it plumb ruined my voice. Why in — didn't yuh swing me around so my head wouldn't be down hill? Gimme uh drink out uh yore canteen, Ike. Did yuh git him?"

"You bein' dead, Magpie, I failed to see what difference th' lie of yore body makes to you; my canteen gits drilled, and I did not git him!"

"Clear and concise, Ike. You shore e-lim-inates unnecessary words. Did you hit any thin' a-tall?"

"You," sez I. "You shoots my canteen to ribbons and tears th' tobacco-pocket out uh my pants, Magpie."

Magpie wipes uh trickle of blood off his cheek and runs his finger tenderlike over th' furrow on his head.

"Ike, I've allus thought that uh danged fool was an object uh pity and should be regarded with indulgence, but when one danged fool deputizes another to help him be uh—huh!"



MAGPIE breaks off his discourse and stares across th' washout to where uh few boulders are half buried in th' sand.

"Look, Ike!" he yells. "Ain't that somethin' behind them rocks?" Somethin' was right! Reposin' behind them rocks is two canvas sacks, each marked \$5000 in black letters and sealed with red wax. They feels to weigh about twenty pounds apiece, and when yuh shakes 'em they shore are music to th' ear.

"Ike," sez Magpie, after we gits over th' shock, "we made it so hot fer th' Kid that he jist simply drops his plunder behind them rocks and fades away. He don't reckon we'll find 'em. What do yuh know about that? Mebby we won't git th' Kid, Ike, but we shore can herd that coin back to th' home corral, eh?"

"Uh-ha," sez I. "Let's do it right now before any more mistakes are made. Mebby th' Kid will think twice before he runs up against us again."

"You dang well know it!" exclaims Magpie. "Fellers like him have got to be showed, Ike."

We each takes uh sack and toils up th' side of that washout and down th' other side to where we left our bronks.

Th' Kid's hoss, which of course couldn't git away, was still there but th' silver-trimmed saddle and bridle was gone and so was Magpie's buckskin hoss. My bronk was still there and so was both saddles, but th' cinches were all slashed to strings. Pinned to my saddle-horn was th' following e-pistle:

DEAR SHURIF—pleze excuse me fer taking the bukskin the brown mare won't ride bubble. I know cause I oned her once. yours KID.

"What in blazes does he mean about ridin' double, Ike? He was alone wasn't he?"

"Uh-ha," sez I, "but I ain't."

Magpie sits down on th' ground and rubs his sore head and cusses th' Kid from every angle and across th' corners.

"I've heard of th' curse uh gold, Ike, but I never knowed before jist what it meant. Here we've got about forty pounds uh th' yaller stuff and it's at least ten miles to Piperock, and all th' vehicle we got to tote it on is uh buzzard-headed bronk what don't opine to carry double. Also no saddle, —!"

"Well," sez I, "not havin' worn uh hat since I turned that corner in Piperock my brains are about ready to turn over and fry on th' other side, so with yore kind permission we will now prepare to prove th' superiority of mind over matter. Th' Kid states that th' mare won't carry double—that's matter. I think she will, Magpie, and if we thinks it hard enough th' theory is proved. *Sabe?*"

"Mebby," sez he. "I tried it once on uh wildcat. It might work on uh hoss."

I gits up on that hoss and Magpie hands me up th' rifles and th' gold. Th' mare acts like she was hep to somethin', but bein' uh case of walk or ride, Magpie drapes himself behind me and gits hold uh my belt.

"Home, James," sez he, settlin' hisself.

I digs th' mare with my boot-heels and all she does is to git uneasy like with her front feet.

"Well, ain't we goin', Ike?" asks Magpie, sarcastic like.

"I got my end started," sez I, "and if you boots yore end uh li'l mebby we'll git away."

He did jist that thing and we starts. Not slow and easy, like we had plenty uh time, but uh l'il sooner than immediate, if there is such uh thing.

That mare starts sunfishin' right off th' reel. She sticks her nose between her front feet and bawls frequent and loudly, and all th' time she's changin' ends like lightnin' and hittin' th' earth stiff as uh ramrod.

Th' first jump finds me down among her ears, and when she reverses I lands back on her withers, with Magpie's leg wrapped around my shoulders and his hands fussin' with my back hair.

"Stay with her, Ike!" he yells. "Ride—um—st—straight—up! Dog-gone it—don't—s-s-slide around—so—much!"

I shore was ridin' that bronk. I don't believe there was uh spot on her hide that I didn't ride, and all th' time I'm handicapped by havin' Magpie hangin' onto my belt fer dear life and wrappin' his legs around my carcass every time that bronk pulled uh new angle.

Remember, too, that all this time I'm hangin' on to them rifles and forty pounds uh gold. Some exhibition, eh?

But it couldn't last. Once she changed ends so quick that she lifts me straight up, and all I've got left is uh holt from my knees down and I'd have shore been throwed except that Magpie is draped over her rump and actin' as sort of an anchor, but at that I loses my nerve and drops th' rifles and th' gold. Th' bronk hit th' earth at th' same time as th' guns did and one uh them rifles exploded.

That's what might be designated as uh climax. Th' jump that bronk took then was uh world beater. I reckon she never even brushed th' top of uh six-foot mesquite bush, and I loses Magpie right there. Also I loses my reins, and there I am adrift in th' desert without uh rudder and on th' desk of uh loco bronk, who's middle name is "Run."

We split th' breeze down that gully and circled th' lower part of Sentinel Butte so danged fast that I has to hang on to her mane to keep from blowin' off.

We hits level ground at uh mile-uh-minute clip and I catches uh glimpse of uh lot uh hossmen comin' hell bent across country to head me off. They're ridin' some deliberate but they miscalculates my speed, and they was about uh minute late at th' crossroads, so to speak.

Jist about that time I hears some more *flup, flup's*, and after while I hears th' faint pop of uh rifle.

"Shootin' at me!" sez I to th' bronk. "That's shore gittin' to be uh habit with folks."

Pretty soon another bullet buzzes past my ear and I looks back. Th' gang is jist toppin' uh ridge about five hundred yards away and comin' fast. Speed bein' essential I leans over and speaks to that hoss. I reckon she's gun-shy too 'cause she bunches herself and, man, I never knew what speed was before.

She lays right down to th' job and we spurns that country like uh bird. I reckon everythin' would have been right, but jist as we tears into uh big draw full uh mesquite I turns to look back.

I gets that view from an upside-down position and then sinks gracefully from th' sight of man into uh bush filled with cactus. I reckon that mare tried to jump that draw. Anyway, she keeps right on down that draw and when th' bunch of riders arrive she's jist uh memory.

I'm so deep in th' brush that th' bunch don't see me, and I don't advertise my position none whatever.

"Did anybody see which way he went?" asks uh voice, and I recognizes Johnny Myers, of th' Triangle outfit.

There's uh heap of profanity and answers from several people, who seemed to know jist where I am, and then I hears Art Miller remark:

"It's uh cinch he ain't comin' back to see us. All th' time we're debatin' here that mare is coverin' ground like uh scared wolf."

"Are yuh shore it was one of th' Evans gang?" asks uh voice.

"——!" sez Art. "How could I tell? He jist grabs th' hoss and beats it. I said it was one of them 'cause nobody else would have th' gall to come right into town that-away."

"Aw ——!" complains another, which I know is Pete Gonyer. "If we had uh real sheriff we'd——"

Th' rest of it was cut off as they turns and rides away.

I reads once about uh feller who smiled uh 'wry smile'; that's th' kind I used. Pretty fast action when uh feller gits appointed as uh peace officer, gits shot at fer an outlaw and chased fer stealin' hosses all in th' same day, eh?

I unlimbers myself out of that cactus mattress and pokes out of th' brush. I shore am uh specimen. No hat; one sleeve torn off at th' collar and one pant-leg ripped off so far above my boot that I'm positively indecent to look at, and my whole carcass simply reeks with cactus spines.

I shades my eyes and looks back toward where I leaves Magpie. I don't need to look. I knows that I covers about three miles in that race, and anyway there ain't no chance to see him. Even in th' thin desert air that they tell about it's almost impossible to see uh person at three miles, when said person happens to be on th' other side of two ranges of hills.



WELL, to make uh long walk short, I simply got back to where I leaves Magpie and he's still there. He's sittin' in th' shade of uh bush, playin' solitaire. He's got th' nicest black eye I ever seen.

I sits down beside him and watches him make uh misplay before I says uh word.

"Yuh can't play uh red ten on uh red jack," sez I, pointin' it out.

Magpie turns and looks me over with his good eye and plays th' next card deliberate.

"Ike, there ain't no set rules fer anythin' in this country. If I admires to set uh precedent you don't need to horn in. Remember yore only uh deputy."

"Why th' crape on th' window?" I asks.

"Th' curse uh gold!" he snaps.

"How?"

"When me and that hoss parts company I stood on my eye on one uh them sacks you drops so convenient and uh lumpy spot augers into my eye."

Magpie puts th' cards in his pocket and stands up.

"Ike," sez he, "mebby if that bronk hadn't run away with you, and if I hadn't been an honest man we might have taken that ten thousand and beat it fer th' state line."

"Meanin' that I'd have been willin'?"

"You don't have to be honest, Ike. Yore only uh deputy."

"I resigns right here!" sez I. "Jist because I helps yuh out when yuh needs help badly yuh has to keep on insultin' me by callin' me uh deputy. I've been shot at today because yuh don't know yore own hired help from uh bank robber; I've rode high, wide and handsome on th' worst bronk

that ever bit grass, and got pitched off into uh cactus garden to pay fer it, and been chased fer uh hoss-thief. Now after walkin' back three miles minus uh pant-leg and uh sleeve I has to listen to yuh orate on my morals. Magpie, I resigns. *Sabe?*"

"Yuh don't need to git sore, Ike. I ain't puttin' nothin' in yore way. Yore usefulness is over anyway."

"Where's th' gold?" I asks.

"Oh, that," sez Magpie. "Th' Piegan Kid got it."

"You—you—" sez I.

"Don't git yore temperature up, Ike. Remember yore only uh—well, anyway after you leaves I eases up here in th' shade to take uh li'l nap. I knowed you'd come back sometime so I prepares to wait. I jist dozed off when I feels somethin' diggin' into my belt line. I looks down and it's th' muzzle of th' Kid's rifle. Don't ask foolish questions, Ike. Of course I let him have it."

Bein' as there ain't nothin' to say I don't say nothin'. I sits there and spits at uh rock lizard and thinks about uh motto which used to hang on our wall at home. I reckon it was made of yarn, and it reads "We Mourn Our Loss." I don't mean th' loss of th' gold. Pshaw, it wasn't my gold. I was jist mournin' th' sleeve and pant-leg.

"Did th' Kid take our rifles, too?" I ask-ed.

"No, he jist pumped th' shells out and threw 'em in th' brush.

"I got 'em and laid 'em over there by that rock. Dog-gone it, Ike, this shore is th'—lissen! There's somebody comin'."

He hadn't no more than made that remark before here comes that posse around th' side of th' hill and straight toward us. There's Johnny Myers, Art Miller, Pete Gonyer, Andy Johnson and two strangers from th' Triangle.

"Don't mention that brown mare," sez I.

"Not any, Ike. Let me do all th' talkin'."

We stands up as th' bunch arrives and they grins at us.

"Greetin's, sheriff," laughs Art. "You and Ike rusticatin'?"

"Th' horrid things," pipes Andy, in uh falsetto voice, "have been fightin' again."

"Some fight!" roars Pete. "Ike lands his left to Magpie's eye, and Magpie bites Ike's sleeve and pant-leg off."

"You'll be sorry, Pete, fer them words,"

grins Magpie. "Th' next time I has to arrest you fer sheep stealin'——"

"You long disjointed, son-of-uh— well, Magpie, I'd shore hate to repeat what I've heard about you. What are you fellers doin' out here anyway?"

Magpie rolls uh smoke and tells them what we're doin' and why we're stranded. Of course he merely tells 'em that th' Piegan Kid or one of th' Evans gang sets us on foot. He tells 'em about th' robbery, and asks if there was much excitement when they left Piperock?

"Gosh, it's all clear now!" shouts Johnny Myers. "We been wonderin' where that money came from and now we know."

"Didn't you know before?" asks Magpie.

"We shore didn't," stated Art Miller. "One of th' Evans gang comes right into town and lifts my brown mare from th' hitch-rack, so I enlists this bunch to help me recover. It's funny about that money."

"If yuh didn't know that th' bank was robbed," wonders Magpie, "how do yuh know about th'——"

"'Cause she's right here," laughs Johnny, reachin' around and patten' a roll behind his saddle.

"How did yuh git it?" gasped Magpie.

"Made him drop it," explains Johnny. "We're chasin' th' jasper what stole th' hoss from Art and we crosses th' trail of another person who is fannin' th' breeze. He seems to hanker fer solitude so we opines that he's one of th' bunch we want."

"He's ridin' uh li'l buckskin, which is havin' uh hard time in th' sand, and we're gainin' all th' time. Pretty soon we gits close enough to start shootin' and we sees th' jasper heave somethin' into th' brush, and then we loses him in th' breaks beyond th' ol' Poison Spring. We goes back and looks where he throws th' bundle in th' brush and we finds th' sacks uh coin. No wonder that li'l hoss was goin' hard. That stuff weighs uh heap."

"Well," sez Pete, "there ain't no use in holdin' post-mortems out here, so let's git a-goin'."

"Right," agrees Art. "Magpie, you climb on behind me and Ike can double up with Pete."

I climbs right on, but Magpie stands there lookin' over Art's hoss and seems undecided.

"This hoss is plumb tame and broke to ride double," sez Art.

"If it was that mare what got stole I'd shore invite yuh to ride with somebody else. She shore was uh terror."

"She was," said Magpie, and it wasn't uh question either.

As we rides into Piperock there ain't no reception committee and no band in sight and I remarks th' same to Magpie.

"No," sez Magpie, lookin' over at Andy Johnson, who thinks he can play poker, "there wasn't no chance to git out th' band, 'cause all th' tin-horns were out of town."

We rides straight up to th' bank, which we finds closed and locked, but ol' Eph Whittaker, th' banker, is jist tyin' his team to th' hitch-rack. He's been away fer uh few days and we soon finds out that he don't know anything about th' robbery.

"Ten thousand!" he yelps, turnin' alkali color. "My Gawd! And you gits it all back?"

He shore was so tickled that his bow-legs won't hardly support his structure.

"I wonder where James Wilson Spreckles is?" he mumbles. "I'll bet th' pore boy is plumb prostrated over it. Well, well," sez he, excited like. "You boys won't lose on this."

He insists on shakin' hands with all of us and he congratulates Magpie several times and then says—

"Come inside with me, boys, and I'll show yuh what ten thousand in gold looks like."

Never havin' seen more than forty dollars in uh bunch at one time we all goes in gladly and he takes us into th' back room.

"Seals not even scratched," sez he, as he cuts th' string and lets th' contents roll out on th' table.



TH' SILENCE that went up in that room would have blown th' roof off an ordinary building. Eph Whittaker sagged at th' knees until his long nose scraped th' edge of th' table. Johnny Myers turned his tobacco-sack upside-down and spilled all th' tobacco out on th' floor. Magpie stretched and tried to lean against th' wall, which is about ten feet away, lost his balance and fell over uh chair. One of th' strange punchers pushed his finger into th' pile to see if it was real, and then looked at that finger like it was uh curiosity.

Whittaker's cheeks swelled out like uh red balloon and when his face couldn't hold any more he exploded—

"Brass washers and lead slugs!"
 "Gawd A'mighty, ain't it queer!" squeaks
 Andy Johnson.

Whittaker slashes th' other sack. Th'
 contents were th' same, and th' pore man
 lumps over on th' table like uh wet rag.

"There ain't no set rules—" begins Mag-
 pie, but jist then uh li'l voice pipes up from
 th' doorway and we sees James Wilson
 Spreckles lookin' us over with uh scared
 look.

"What—what is th' matter?" he asks,
 rubbin' th' inside of his rubber collar with
 that perfumed handkerchief.

Whittaker points at th' metal on th'
 table.

"Look—look, James, I don't—"

"I see," says James. "Is it all there?"

"Why—why—I—er, James, I—"

"Should be about forty pounds," sez

James. "Of course th' weight ain't
 jist—"

Whittaker straightens up and faces his
 cashier.

"James, do you mean to say that
 you—"

"Well, you see I was afraid that we might
 be held up some day so I fixed up those
 sacks. I was afraid to tell you for fear that
 it might get out. I called them my grouch
 sacks."

"Bein' uh sheriff," sez Magpie, about ten
 minutes later, in th' sanctity of our office,
 "shore gives uh feller uh chance to see what
 uh curse gold is to humanity. Uh course
 you bein' only jist uh plain, ordinary dep-
 uty—"

I cut off th' oration by shuttin' th' door,
 and sneakin' home to git somethin' to cover
 my bare leg.



The WILL to DIE

by EDWIN C. DICKENSON

IT WAS the fifth night Santee
 had come back to the *Ariel*
 drunk. It was also the fifth
 night that the big skipper had
 come back to an empty boat, for no cabin-
 boy would stand his abuse, much less
 face the insane glare of his heavy-lidded eyes
 that held death in them for the man who
 crossed him.

He swore as the sight of the sloop remind-
 ed him of the fact.

"Have I got to eat my own cooking an-
 other day?" he muttered.

He swung heavily off the string-piece of
 the wharf to the deck of the *Ariel* a few feet
 below, steadying himself with a hand on the
 shrouds. A dark form on the deck-house
 took life and sat up.

Swaying, a hand still on the shrouds, he
 considered it in silence for a moment, then—

"What the devil!" he demanded belliger-
 ently.

"It's—me," came the explanatory answer, and so astonished was Santee that for the moment he could say nothing, for the voice was that of a woman.

Then he let out a great roar of brutish laughter.

"Oh, it's 'me,' is it?" he mocked. "And who might 'me' be?"

The woman got slowly to her feet.

"They said you were looking for a cook," she spoke sullenly.

Again he roared.

"A woman cook on the *Ariell*?"

"Well, what's the matter with that?"

He stopped short and peered with drunken intentness at her.

"I guess you don't know who I am," he growled with slow and ugly significance.

And then the woman laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh. There was little in it that goes to make a laugh. Nothing of mirth and a great deal of bitterness.

"I guess you don't know who I am?" she flaunted his words back at him.

Her unexpected stand almost sobered him.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded.

"They call me Crazy Ann," she answered.

"Well I'll be —!" commented the drunken skipper.

For Santee knew of Crazy Ann, although he had not before met her. The whole wharf-front knew of her wild escapades. With drunken deliberateness, he fumbled for his match-safe, struck a light and held it wavering before her face.

It was a striking face even then. Full and bold and dark of eye and even handsome, in a coarse way, in the faint light of the match that failed to show the ravages of drink.

It was a face that half the police magistrates of the county knew, a face that had won her more chances perhaps than she deserved and yet had not saved her from spending three-fourths of her time in jail.

Santee made an effort at whistling.

"You're a good-looker all right."

"What you want is a good cook. Never mind my looks," she answered sourly.

"So?" he taunted.

He put a hand on her shoulder. She shook it off. He caught at her wrist and drew her toward him. Promptly she bent her head and sank her teeth into his hand.

He let go of her with a curse, started toward her and stopped, held back by some

glimmering sense of fair play that elbowed itself into his besotted mind.

"You've got the right stuff in you. I like your grit," he grunted, "and I'll sign you on. You can sleep forward in the man's berth," he rambled on. "Get to it through a hatchway forward of the mast. I'm going to bed."

He stumbled aft to the cabin companion-way and was making his way down this when the woman spoke.

Her voice was wheedling now.

"Say," she queried with an attempt at casualness, "you haven't got a pint about you, have you?"

"Sure," he crowed. "Come down into the cabin and get it."

She turned away. Half-crazed as she was by the insane desire for alcohol, an instinct, be it of fear or something nobler, decided her. She made her way forward to the square opening in the deck forward of the mast, lowered herself into this, pulled the hatch-cover into place and hooked it. Then she felt her way to a musty-smelling berth and throwing herself upon it promptly went to sleep.



SANTEE, because habit was yet stronger than drag of dissipation, got up at the break of day. Murder would have been a pleasant pastime with him at this hour, with the poisons of his night's carouse attacking him at the point of least resistance. He threw a bucket attached to a rope over the side, hauled it aboard and sluiced his hot face with the cold brine.

He was not a bad-looking man with the cleansing, revivifying touch of the seawater on him. He was under forty, with tawny hair, and eyes that were of that intense blue often seen in seafarers. Nose and chin were prominent and, for all the great frame that it was set upon, there was something leonine in his massive head. There was nothing mean in the man physically. His was a case of a decent nature gone off at a tangent by a reason other than weakness. Yet there was little in that unshaven face to inspire pity that morning.

With the dash of water some memory of the events of the previous night came back to him. He strode heavily forward along the deck, kicked at the hatchway and cursed when he saw it was locked. Then a crafty look came into his eyes and he set about

making sail. He had a cook at last and he could make sure of her before she changed her mind.

His great frame swayed on both halyards at once and sent the heavy mainsail up to the whirl of the blocks. Properly peaked, he delayed his halyards, cast off his mooring lines, sent up the jib and ran aft to the wheel with a nimbleness surprising in one of his bulk and habits. Slowly the sloop gathered momentum and drew away from the wharves. Below, the woman slept on.

Land was a knoll on the horizon when Crazy Ann pushed aside the hatch-cover and came on deck. The bright light of day played havoc with her. Ruthlessly it showed the disorder and dullness of her neglected hair, the coarse, unhealthy, whiteness of her cheeks, the burnt-out eyes. Even the raw-nerved skipper voiced his disgust.

"Clean up, woman!" he cried. "There's a bucket of water—more than you've had in many a day I'll bet."

She looked sullenly at him as he stood behind the wheel.

"None too handsome yourself," she sneered.

Yet she acted on his suggestion and the cold, clear, salty water brightened her as it had him.

"Got a comb?" she asked, half ashamed.

"Yes—but I use it myself," he said with brutal frankness.

"Keep it!" she retorted.

She ran her fingers through her hair, braided it and coiled it with an art that is part of most women not unbecomingly on her head.

Santee watched her in silence.

"You know where the galley is?" he said, when she had finished.

She nodded shortly and disappeared down the hatchway again. To Santee's surprise she came up again with soap and a basin of fresh water and scrubbed her palms until they must have suited the most fastidious chef.

She left him again and presently savory odors drifted back to the big man at the wheel. He took a new interest in life. He was about to eat some one else's cooking aboard the old *Ariel*.

A few minutes later the woman's head rose out of the hatchway. She set a steaming dish on the deck, climbed the short ladder and approached him, bearing his breakfast of crisp bacon, boiled potatoes and cof-

fee. Oddly enough there was something of the anxiety of the housewife about her as she set it before him on the wheel-box.

He passed a lashing over a spoke and attached it. He ate it with the relish of the outdoor man, steadily, intently, with obvious enjoyment, until it was all gone. Then he condescended to throw her a glance of approval.

"First decent meal I've had aboard in a month."

Actually she flushed. She started to go forward again when he stopped her.

"Wait," he ordered. "I don't dare leave the wheel. At the head of my berth you will find a jug. Bring it up."

She looked at him and then about the horizon. The sea was rough, rougher than she had realized and the wind drove the coasting sloop along at a surprising pace. There was not another sail in sight.

She turned without answering and went down the companionway into the cabin.

"Can't you find it?" he growled impatiently, as she did not appear at once.

"Wait a minute," she called.

Something in her tone aroused his quick suspicion.

"Bring it up or I'll be down," he ordered savagely. And still she did not come. He glanced to windward with the intuitive caution of the sailor. A black squall was chasing over the sea toward them. The sloop was running before the wind. A jibe might well mean dismasting—even a capsizing. It would be on them in a minute. Yet in a minute what might not Crazy Ann do to his slender stock of liquor?

The drunkard persisted over the sailor. He dropped the lashing on the wheel and ran below.

Crazy Ann sat on his berth, an evil joy in her eyes and the big jug to her lips, so fearful that he would stop her before she had drunk her fill that the precious liquor was overflowing and streaming down her chin and throat.

Santee snatched the jug away with one hand and with the other caught her a terrible blow that dropped her to the floor. Then as with the fear of a miser for his gold he lifted the jug to his own lips he felt the sloop come quickly to an even keel, saw the big mainsail scythe over and braced himself for the catastrophe that he feared must follow.

The boom brought up with a terrific

snatch at the sheets. The sloop heeled until he dropped the jug to save himself. He sprang for the open companionway and gained the deck and the wheel. Slowly the stanch old craft righted herself. He got her once more off before the wind.

Down below the contents of the jug were draining out with mocking gurglings beside the senseless woman.

The day wore on and the gale grew in strength. Crazy Ann had crawled out of the cabin and sat braced in the open companionway. She was not drunk nor was she sober. Her system had been quieted but not satisfied. She was more at peace with the world than she had been or than Santee was.

They were still driving down the coast with the land a faint line on the horizon and no other sail in sight. The *Ariel* was an atom in the senseless chaos of a universe new to her. Yet she was not seasick, and if she was afraid she did not show it. Whatever the crimes laid to the door of Crazy Ann there was none that had the lack of physical courage at its root. She watched in fascination the *Ariel* climb those endless and even steeper hills and slide down into the valleys beyond.

And now and again her glance wandered to the big man at the wheel. He had not spoken to her since he snatched the jug from her mouth. There was something so new about him now that it attracted even her indifferent attention.

Santee had come into his own. This was his heritage. Life at last was sweet. There was something heroic in the sway of his great figure to the surge and roll of the old sloop, something inspiring at the sight of his wide shoulders straining at the wheel to keep her from broaching to.

His eyes had cleared and, steady once again, shifted but from the sea ahead to the telltale luff of the big mainsail and back. His lips were parted in a smile that seemed to mock his ancient enemy the sea. Once, catching her eyes on him he roared above the noise of the gale

"Well—woman, is there the like of this on your rum-soaked shore?"

Slowly, half understanding, she had shaken her head in negation. It was so long since she had been thrilled by aught but strong drink she had not recognized it.

Yet it was lonely out on that great cold

sea with nothing but this cockleshell of a boat between her and the countless fathoms and an obsessed man at the wheel. It dwarfed those petty sordid problems of her shiftless life to insignificance. It changed the course of her thoughts from the pursuit of alcohol and the escape from what it brought, to the greatest and final - of - all issue, that of life and death.

She looked at the big man at the wheel with new eyes. Here, after all, was not the brute she had known who lived for liquor and saw in woman a plaything. Here was one who cared but that he was a man and not at all that she was a woman. For he was playing the biggest game in life, the gamble of life against death, playing it eagerly, joyously, with berserk abandon.



A SHOUT from him startled her. He had snatched a hand from the wheel and was pointing off to starboard. At first she saw nothing, and then she sensed that there was something now on the crest now in the trough of the sea that was not a part of it, and as her eyes dwelt on it she made out an open boat with a dark figure crouched low in it.

She glanced back at the sailor.

"Some one blown offshore," he shouted.

His eyes sparkled with excitement. He seemed lifted out of himself.

"Woman," he shouted again; "you're no good alive. Are you ready to die in a good cause?"

There might have been anger in the glance she gave him back. There was no fear—only question.

"There's a life to save over yonder and a chance to save it. So long as we run before the wind the old hooker will stand up to it; but when I bring her on the wind——"

He tossed his hand in gesture more eloquent than words.

"Shall we try it?" he asked.

Crazy Ann was in no state of exaltation such as buoyed up this Viking man. She faced the facts coldly, without enthusiasm. There was nothing of the consciously heroic about her, yet, "Go to it!" she called back with a careless scorn that put his fine manner to shame. He stared at her in wonder that changed to admiration.

"Gad, woman!" he cried. "I wish I had known you ten years ago. Hold fast!" he warned.

He put the wheel hard down and reeled

in the big mainsail with the strength of an ancient charioteer.

Over went the sloop—over until it seemed to the woman, braced in the companionway that the sea lay directly beneath her.

She was human, and no one could have been and not known fear at that moment when the sloop lay with her sail half in the water. Yet she made no outcry. Her eyes went to the big skipper as a child's to its parent. Only he could save them. And he did.

Slowly the sloop righted. She rose to the seas and forged ahead. They charged down on her, sheeting the water the length of her, but she held on.

"Good *Ariel*," the big man shouted in exultation, and the woman, her life of filth swept clean of all but the elemental, saw again, as with the eyes of a young girl, her ideal. Again she knew the joy of hero worship. He had said that he wished he could have met her ten years ago. Ah, she wished with a sudden pang that he but could have.

She glanced over the pitching boat to the sea ahead. The object of their change of course was close aboard, now. It was a small open launch, lying at the mercy of the seas, and crouched in the bottom of it was a man in black who waved constantly, despite the fact of their swift approach.

A short distance from him Santee put up his helm that he might have room to round to. A despairing wail came down the wind to them at this apparent act of desertion.

"Keep your nerve, fool!" bellowed the great voice of Santee. "And get ready to jump."

He shot the *Ariel* into the wind and ranged her so cleverly alongside the small launch that an egg would scarcely have cracked between the two.

Awkwardly the sole occupant of the launch started to climb aboard. The big sailor left his wheel, pounced upon him as a hawk on a sparrow and threw him into the cockpit. Then he fought the lashing sheets and thundering canvas until the sloop had come about and was standing in for the distant shore.

The rescued man lay on the cockpit floor, apparently senseless. The woman looked inquiringly at Santee, as if for an order. For a moment his eyes held hers, then he shouted:

"There is a flask in my berth under the pillow. Go get it."

Without hesitation she turned and went

down below where the motion of the craft was sickening. In a moment she had returned, deathly pale, with the flask. The rush of the gale revived her. She bent over the still form and rolled him over so that she might administer the liquor. He was clothed in the habiliments of the clergy.

She took the cork from the flask and poured some of the liquor between his lips. The fragrance of it was heavenly to her. She clutched the bottle with fingers that well-nigh crushed the glass. Her whole system craved alcohol as a man in a fever craves water.

She raised it mechanically half-way to her lips when her eyes met those of the big sailor. She had expected to see derision and anger and saw instead something very much like sadness. Abruptly she poured the remaining liquor through the clenched teeth. The clergyman coughed and sat up.

But now Santee's glance had gone to the woman's feet. He pointed at them.

"What's that?" he demanded, a light of concern in his eyes. Her feet were wet and so was her dress, half-way to her knees. In the excitement of the moment she had forgotten to tell him.

"There is a foot of water down there," she called.

He cast a glance ahead where the land was rising all too slowly from the sea. Then he looked down at the clergyman. He was young, perhaps thirty-five, broad of forehead, weak of chin, soft with good living. Santee pulled a galvanized bucket from under a stern thwart.

"You will have to bail," he shouted to the man. "I can't leave the wheel."

The rescued man looked up at him with new fear.

"What if we should sink while I am down there?" he faltered.

"We'll sink anyway if you don't go," shouted back the big man in scornful anger.

Painfully the clergyman took the bucket and crawled below. Clinging to the weather-rail, Crazy Ann watched him anxiously. When her life had been in the hands of the big sailor she had felt no great fear for it, but now that it depended upon another—upon this man of inaction—her hope waned. And well it might. Before he had thrown out a single bucketful, he was scrambling on deck not with seasickness but with sickness of fear. He prayed aloud, not for all of them, but for himself.

Desperately Santee glanced from his groveling form to the woman. Her face had taken on a new look of resolution. Her eyes were really beautiful with courage that had stood the test.

She slipped from the weather-rail to the companionway and down this into the cabin. Standing in there, with the water washing back and forth almost to her knees, she threw pail after pail of water out into the self-bailing cockpit.

Tirelessly she filled and emptied the heavy bucket. Santee watched her with a curious admixture of emotions, pride in her and scorn of the other, admiration at what she was and poignant regret at what she had been. She had the right stuff in her as he had said before. What a pity that such a woman should go wrong!

And then he smiled grimly to himself. What difference did it make after all, now? Making water as rapidly as the sloop was, she would never reach land before she filled and sank. He had no small boat, and even if he had it would not live in that sea.

Crazy Ann lagged in her work. More slowly the pail was raised to the level of the deck and longer it lingered there as she turned out the water. Her lips were set, her face contorted with the effort, and yet she fought on with the water rising even higher.

"Come on deck!" Santee called to her at last. "There is nothing more you can do," and the look he gave her sent the blood back into her weary face.

She crept along the slanting deck to his side, carefully avoiding the clergyman who clung to the weather-rail, his eyes fixed longingly on the distant shore.

To Crazy Ann this seemed not a great distance away, now. Only Santee knew how desperate were their straits. Solid water sheeted over the *Ariel* as she wallowed and rolled with the weight of water in her. The sloop rose more sluggishly to each succeeding sea, and more than once a fierce turn of the wheel alone saved them from a breaking comber.

A cry from the man of the cloth drew the others' eyes to him. He was looking astern and the light of a great hope had transfig-

ured him. They followed his glance. A steamer had come over the rim of the sea and was rapidly overtaking them.

And now, as if conscious that its prey might escape its grasp, the sea sent a succession of graybeards charging down on the staggering sloop. Wearily she climbed the first. The second burst before she had topped the crest. Even then she might have shaken herself free but for the third.

Santee knew what it meant. He snatched the single life-preserver from its hook in the cockpit and passed it to the woman.

"Strap it on quick!" he cried.

She hesitated.

"Is it the only one?" she demanded.

"Yes—hurry," he commanded imperiously.

A strange light came into her eyes. He did not perceive what she was about, bracing himself as he was for the shock of the sea, until she had passed a quick arm about him and started to make the life-belt fast about his waist.

He shook her off angrily.

"What do you think I am!" he shouted. "Put it on yourself, I tell you!"

She let it fall to the deck. There was no questioning the look of exaltation in her eyes, now.

"I am no good alive." She repeated his words. "Let me die right. I am not afraid."

The sea was towering over them now. The sloop was not rising to it. He dropped the useless wheel and reached for the life-belt to force it on her. His hands came back empty. The clergyman had snatched it up and was strapping it on with feverish haste.

Murder in his eyes Santee took a step toward the groveling figure.

"Don't!" cried Crazy Ann, her hands on his shoulders. "Better that we should die than he."

Santee looked down at her in wonder.

"God!" he cried with final conviction, and it was more a prayer than an oath. "We can die decent if we couldn't live decent."

His arm went about her as the weight of the sea fell on the *Ariel* and snuffed out her life.

IN THE SAWDUST COUNTRY



by HARRISON R. HOWARD

GROVER DONALSON should never have come up into the sawdust country. He was eminently unfit. The land of sawdust is a rude, cruel country, and demands colossal rigor in its denizens. It is a land of flesh and bone and muscle; and Donalson came with naught but a splendid gameness in the face of overwhelming odds. Thus, into the land of flesh he came without flesh qualification. He was essentially a little man. Tall he was, to be sure, well above the average in quieter civilizations; but his shoulders were slight of build and narrow; his hips were delicate and slim; his neck was spindle and from his ungainly arms hung long, bony hands. On the whole the impression he gave was one of delicacy, a timidity of bulk it might be called. This is the sort of man who burst open the doors of the Triple Star saloon one night and faced adventure, up in the sawdust country where the fondest tradition is that only the big survive—the little all die off.

His advent into the country amounted to no less than sheer audacity; and whether it was this same audacity, or his ignorance, which prompted him to choose of all sawdust sections the Suicide River country must remain as yet a mystery. And a mystery he was from the Spring morning when he disembarked to the little dock at Floraville, which is situated five miles inland from where the Suicide pours its limpid flood into the lazy Pacific, to the night of the affair in the Triple Star.

The initial mystery was that immediately upon Donalson's arrival, Roberts, the Bilge Water Mill Company's timekeeper, was

removed and Donalson given his place. Later it was learned that Roberts had been transferred to the other mill owned by the Bilge Water people; and that, although it was not so important a post, he was given a startling increase of pay, and, it was whispered, the promise of his old job back again in the near future. Added to this was the fact that very often, after the hungry saws had ceased their screeching passages through the yellow fir logs, Donalson was seen in the mill office, engaged in earnest conversation with McDonald, the manager.

He was not liked by the sawdust men, at least he was not accepted by them. They did not know him, nor would they give opportunity for him to acquaint himself. Around the mess- and bunk-houses he was cheerful and amiable until he sensed their attitude; then he let them alone and proceeded to labor away a solitary, lonely existence. He was not one of them; they could not know him. He was an unknown quantity and inspired all the distrust of the uncomprehended.

Now, there is a girl in Grover Donalson's story. She doesn't figure very largely in the action, but her effect was tremendous.

He met her one evening at dusk, just when the day was turning the world over to the night, and the pine forests on the river's opposite shore were beginning to drape themselves in haze, and from the low meadows the chorus of the night creatures was beginning.

On the street leading to the dock he met McGregor, the mill's senior tallyman, who had been born in Scotland, raised in Ireland and polished in America. His polish was as

hard and pure as that which the huge saws give to the fir cants that roll out on the sorting-table for his swift eye to measure and judge.

"A beautiful gloamin' it is, Donalson," he greeted. "Will you come down to the dock with me? My daughter is comin' home for vacation from the college at Eugene."

Donalson looked his gratitude as he fell into step.

"I can help you carry the suit-cases, McGregor," he offered.

McGregor laughed heartily and glanced at his companion from out the corner of an eye.

"Sure you make me think you've got a daughter of your own, the way you know how much luggage is connected with a young lady at college. But no; you're far too young."

Donalson smiled indulgently.

"No daughter, McGregor, not even a wife."

"And you've got plenty of time yet. No man should marry afore he's over twenty-five unless he's gettin' a good salary, and the Bilge Water outfit don't give fortunes to their timekeepers.

Donalson suppressed a smile.

"My salary is very modest, to be sure," he said, and fell to watching the approaching launch.

"There she is," McGregor cried suddenly, waving a hand. "There she is, Donalson, under the light on the lower deck!"



THE girl under the light suddenly seeing them, raised her hand and threw a kiss. Donalson removed his hat solemnly and stood uncovered while the launch was being made fast. The girl rushed down the gang-plank, the launch porter in her wake with three suit-cases.

McGregor gave a little cry and rushed forward to take her in his arms. Donalson awkwardly took up two of the suit-cases the porter had set down, and stood watching the slim girl in her father's arms. He noticed how trim was her suit, and how royally it was filled by the form beneath it. And when the girl turned, at McGregor's stumbled introduction, he set down one of the cases and took the warm hand she extended. He saw then that her eyes were gray and searching.

Donalson bowed gravely above the hand, and next moment was ascending to the

street, a suit-case in either hand, the vivacious, gray-eyed girl beside him, chatting, in all the freedom of her youth, of things which had happened since last she beheld the big gray mill.

As they made their way along Center Street the girl clung tightly to her father's arm, and, as she talked, now and then cast furtive glances at the silent, somber figure of Donalson at her side.

When they reached the McGregor gate Donalson left them, despite their protests and invitations. He had an engagement so he said. But the real reason for his abrupt departure was his desire to get away from the scrutiny of the gray eyes belonging to Coreen McGregor.

Fifteen minutes later, he reached the bunk-house and, perching himself on the edge of his bunk, tried to think it out coherently. That he was strangely affected he did not question.

He found himself looking again into those gray eyes, narrowed to penetrate the lowering dusk. They were very searching eyes, he decided, and they held a wealth of woman-mystery and woman-lure. He remembered, too, her frank, straight-arm handclasp and her circumspect glances at him which he even more circumspectly had caught. He decided to see no more than was absolutely necessary of Coreen McGregor.

But Donalson did not abide by that decision; and therein lies the first cause to his adventure within the swinging-doors of the Triple Star saloon.

He saw a great deal more of Coreen McGregor in the days that followed than there was any conceivable reason for. In that time they formed the habit of rocking through the long evenings on the porch of the McGregor home, talking of people and things in the world outside the sawdust land. Also, to the surprise of his fellows, Donalson fell into a habit of whistling about the bunk-house.

Then one night Donalson swung open the doors of the Triple Star saloon and embraced his adventure. It was close to eighty-three, and in the haze of tobacco-smoke a picturesque crowd of sawdust men was lined up along the bar or sat in at poker around the circular tables at the rear of the room and thumbed their cards closely.

Donalson crossed to an empty space on the bar front, and when whisky was brought

poured himself a stiff nightcap. He had half raised the glass to his lips when he suddenly became alert, paused and set down the glass.

From out the babble of many conversations, he had caught the words of a huge giant who sprawled lazily against the bar, addressing half a dozen similarly built men. Donalson recognized him at once as Dave Ferguson, the big river-man who had charge of the mill's boom.

"Have you noticed our little timekeeper lately?" he was asking, leering contemptuously above the words. "Ain't it — the way he's hangin' around the skirts of that girl of McGregor's?"

Donalson, a flush mounting to his features, crossed directly to the river-man.

"Well, here he is now!" Ferguson welcomed with an ugly, awkward laugh.

The flush increased on Donalson's face.

"Ferguson," he said evenly, "in the country I come from a man doesn't pass a lady's name across a public bar."

Ferguson straightened up his enormous body and set his hat on the back of his head.

"What in — country do *you* come from, eh?"

"That doesn't alter the case any, Ferguson."

Ferguson lurched forward, sneering into the other's face. Before the giant's stature Donalson's littleness was magnified doubly. His shoulders were scarcely wider than the lapels of the river-man's coat; his head was not on a level with the other's eyes.

"Well, what are you doin' about it?" Ferguson asked.

Donalson measured the flesh bulk before him, and the idea came that this man represented all the elements he had had to contend with in the sawdust country, gross flesh, muscle, and structure. And as in his conquest with his environment, so in his present encounter, he stood devoid of the qualifications with which men meet such elements. His only weapon was his audacious gameness, and that weapon was polished and ready as he faced the giant before him.

"What am I doing about it?" he repeated quietly. "I'm telling you that you won't pass that lady's name across this or any other public bar in God's wide world!"

A huge laugh went up. Men left the green-covered, circular tables and their close-thumbed cards to group about the

two. Necks were craned, individual conversations roughly hushed, the room stood quietly expectant.

"Since when is a — pencil-pushin' non-producer goin' to dictate to me, I want to know?"

Donalson leaned his lean, flushed face close to the other's. His eyes were drawn to narrow lines, and his words, when he replied, seemed to be formed by his teeth rather than by his lips.

"Ferguson, I don't want to have to fight you. I don't care to——"

"Fight?" roared the highly amused river-man, who couldn't somehow keep from his eyes a vague glimmer of respect.

"Why you couldn't fight a fat Chinook salmon, comin' up-river to spawn. Little feller, God nor man don't make laws that tell me how to talk."

He turned quickly to the onlooking group.

"Listen to me, you fellers, I'm goin' to tell you about this young feller and that McGregor girl. She——"

He turned quickly back to the timekeeper who had shifted his position. The little man sighed just a little wearily, glanced about him at the circle of flesh that ringed him in, then quickly slipped out of his coat.

"Ferguson," he snapped, "you've got to fight now. Peel off your mackinaw—you're going to need plenty of room. I once took a deal of pleasure killing a rat."

Ferguson spat contemptuously upon the sawdust floor.

"Fight you? Do you want me run up for murder? Why, if I was to hit you just once playful-like I'd bust you all to pieces."

Donalson flushed as if a lash had been laid across his face.

"Ferguson, you're a — quitter. You're afraid of me!"

With an animal roar, as his outraged dignity overcame his scruples, Ferguson squirmed out of his jacket, and cast the garment back over his head. Then both opponents spread out their arms and pushed back the willing circle. And in the glare of the swinging lamps overhead the little and the big faced each other.



THE fighters crouched, their bodies seeming to contract behind their fists. They circled about the open space, hemmed in by the wall of huge bodies and peering faces. They made as ludicrous

a picture as would have a game-cock facing a lion; and the bartender as he leaned across his bar, muttered—

"The blamed little fool, gettin' all busted up over a — female."

Then the fighters came together. The big river-man sprang in, swinging heavily with his right, but he misjudged the height of his opponent and his fist landed on the other's skull. Donalson was not a fighter, much less a boxer, but, as the blow struck, he threw his head to one side, and half the fist's weight went on past him as it glanced. The force which the river-man had put into the effort carried him on toward the other, and, quickly drawing himself up, Donalson sent a smashing blow of his lean knuckles full upon Ferguson's right cheek.

The slap of the blow still echoed among the rafters when the river-man collected himself, and, quivering with rage, descended upon the timekeeper, his huge fist breaking through the other's guard and landing squarely on the point of his chin.

So terrific was the blow that it spun Donalson completely about; and as he crumpled to the sawdust-strewn floor the white-faced onlookers heard the faint sigh that escaped his firmly pressed lips.

Somebody laughed, and was immediately hushed. The bartender reached for his towel and muttered—

"For a blamed female!"

Ferguson rubbed his bleeding cheek and mumbled—

"Little cuss—tried to bust my jaw!"

Anderson, the pony-sawyer, who stood next to the bar, carried a glass of whisky and poured it between Donalson's lips; then, when he opened his eyes, assisted him with the help of two others to his feet. He stood tottering and blinking for a moment, but when he caught Ferguson's sneering glance he staggered toward him. Thereupon the sawyer and his assistants took hold of him again, and, escorting him to the door, thrust him gently but persuasively out into the night air.

He rested against the front of the building until the cold air fully revived him, then made his way to a small side street which would insure him an unseen passage to the bunk-house. When he reached the second corner he halted quickly. From behind, some one had called his name.

He swung about and came face to face with Coreen McGregor. On her arm was a

market-basket, heavy with her evening shopping. He glanced up at her face and saw the fire of contempt in her gray eyes.

"I saw them *throw* you out," she panted quickly. "Drinking and brawling! Ugh! How beastly!"

She stepped close to him then and her hand caught his arm.

"Grover, why—why did you? Oh, it's below you! And you—you said that you cared, that you loved me!" Her voice broke, and tears began to course down her cheeks.

"I don't love you!" she cried angrily, dropping his arm suddenly, as if it were a thing untouchable. "I don't! I don't! I hate you!"

She stepped flushed and panting before him while her gray eyes flashed angrily; then, when sobbing took hold of her, turned abruptly and disappeared down the dark side street. And to Donalson's ears, as he made his way home, the bartender's words persisted in echoing.



A LARGE crowd filled the Triple Star the following night. The tale of

Donalson's daring was recounted a dozen times or more, at each telling gathering color and glamour. The listeners were strangely thrilled and a species of respect dawned in their eyes.

Dave Ferguson was spinning the yarn from his point of view for the ears of all the room, when the doors were suddenly swung open and Donalson stepped upon the sawdust floor. The word which the river-man was uttering died, half-born, upon his lips.

Donalson advanced directly, peeling off his coat.

"All right, Ferguson," he said shortly, "we'll just finish it now."

Ferguson, startled out of his careless ease, straightened up from his characteristic sprawl against the bar.

"So," he sneered, "you didn't get enough, eh? Come back after me like an angry god for an errin' angel." His rage mastered him then, and he slid out of his coat. "I'll get you right this time, you little rat!"

The blood pulsed to his face and seemed about to burst forth at the swelling on his cheek where Donalson's lean fist had landed.

The bartender laid aside his towel to lean across the bar, the card-tables were deserted, and once more the circle formed about

them. The ensuing battle was much more spectacular than that of the night before.

While Fergerson had benefited none from the previous encounter, unless a fattening of his soul be counted, Donalson had learned. He avoided with some degree of certainty his opponent's mad rushes, and forced him to fight standing up instead of in headlong sallies. Also he was very careful to protect the point of his chin.

Those of the onlookers who had witnessed the battle of the night before had seen naught in Donalson's fight but his sheer gameness; but in the present encounter the observing saw more.

Donalson struck, in the few times he managed to land, always on one spot. That was on the swelling at the side of Fergerson's cheek. Three times he landed with all his might, and, while it was not much, yet his thin bony knuckles cut deeply into the irritated surface of the swelling. At the third blow a fleeting daze sprang into the river-man's eyes, as if the excruciating hurt were numbing his brain. He shook the dizziness from him and, with a gasped oath, sprang in, whipped his great paw through Donalson's guard and sent him reeling to the floor.

Before any one could move, and even ere the victorious Fergerson could relax his pose, Donalson scrambled to his feet and stood there rocking crazily. In the silence the breathing of the watchers sounded like the surge of distant surf. Donalson staggered on his feet and took a single, faltering step toward the great river-man.

"Fergerson," he mumbled drunkenly, "I'll—I'll—get you if—if——"

His voice droned low and ceased utterance. The biting pain of his frail body befogged his brain again, and he withered where he stood and crumpled to the floor.

A man in the front row of the circle muttered, "God!" Another and still another swore more cogently.

As on the night previous there had been but three to raise him, now the whole room, animated as by a single impulse, moved to lift the recumbent Donalson. Nor did they thrust him out into the air to make his way home as best he could. Still unconscious, he was lifted between two burly jacks from up-river and carried from the Triple Star, half a dozen other sawdusters following in attendance. They took him to the bunk-house and laid him almost tenderly in his bunk.

His eyes opened after a moment and he looked gratefully into their faces. His lips twitched humorously.

"Will you—you fellows help me home to—tomorrow—night?" Then his eyelids closed again as he swung off once more into blackness.

"Is the little guy crazy?" asked Louis Peterson.

"Crazy ——!" snapped the mill's head-rig dogger. "That shows what you river stiffs know. He's game—that's all."

Next morning McDonald, the mill manager, went the timekeeper's rounds. Which extraordinary circumstance was well worthy of the notoriety it quickly gained. From the head-sawyer down to the lowly conveyor tenders, there were curious glances and tense conversations.

When the morning boat came down-river from meeting the north-bound train from far-away San Francisco, it brought a dark, bewhiskered individual who carried an ominous round little hand-bag and a suit-case. He immediately made inquiries for McDonald, and found the manager standing on the sawyer's platform watching the operation of changing saws; and when the stranger introduced himself the head-rig crew was in hearing distance.

"Mr. McDonald?" he inquired with brisk direction. "I am Dr. Harrigan. Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Donalson?"

The manager glanced apprehensively at the listening crew, and hastily drew the doctor aside.

"He's over in the bunk-house. He got a little cut up in a fight last night and didn't come to work today."

"Bunk-house—fighting?" the doctor exclaimed aghast.

"Oh, yes," the manager laughed nervously; "he fits into the raw places up here as though he was made for it. He lives with the boys and keeps time at sixty-five a month."

The doctor muttered an expletive under his breath which was highly unnecessary and wholly out of keeping with his general dignity. Then he hurried out of the mill and chose a course in the direction of the sleeping quarters. That was the last the sawdust men saw of him, but it was rumored that he had taken the afternoon boat to make connections with the south-bound limited.

 IT WAS seven-thirty that evening when Donalson pushed open the Triple Star's doors and advanced across the sawdust-strewn floor, stripping off his coat. He made his way directly toward Ferguson, who stood in his usual place, a swelling on his right cheek the size of a small toy balloon, over which was stuck two generous strips of adhesive tape.

Donalson had negotiated half the intervening distance when two of the sawdust men stepped before him.

"Nothin' doin' Donalson. You're totterin' now. Do you want him to kill you?"

Donalson brushed them aside, a rough laugh coming from his lips.

"Kindly do not interfere. I know what I am doing. I've got Ferguson just where I want him, and now I'm going to get him right. Strip, Ferguson!"

Ferguson did not need a second invitation. His jacket was off in a moment.

"Ain't had enough yet, eh?" the river-man sneered, advancing. "I'm goin' to bite you into little bits and spit you out!"

Donalson laughed harshly as he crouched and began to circle.

"You're going to eat words tonight, Ferguson!" he said evenly.

And, with the words still echoing among the rafters above, he leaped forward, his right arm and tightly knotted fist streaking through the air like the spark of a wireless instrument, and brought up solidly with a dull crunch upon Ferguson's right cheek. For an imperceptible second the river-man halted, blood streaming from the tantalized swelling on his cheek. Then in a blind rush he sprang forward.

The little man ducked. He had learned twice the efficacy of Ferguson's right swings which invariably accompanied his head-long lunges. As Donalson straightened, his right arm hooked up and again impacted solidly on Ferguson's cheek.

The giant's eyes clouded with the pain, as if a thick gauze had dropped just behind his pupils. He shook his head in a dazed way and crouched for another spring. He decided not to repeat the last disastrous rush but to wait for an opening.

Donalson circled the open space again. His eyes were mere slits of flashing light, and, though he tottered perceptibly on his feet, and his breath labored from his lungs, yet he presented a formidable aspect, with-

al. Somehow, to the onlookers, the ludicrous element had gone out of the combat. The cunning of the one was proving a match for the flesh of the other.

A third time Donalson's fist met the taped cheek of the other; then Ferguson landed. Donalson's defense crumpled before its weight, and he went back against the circle of men.

Ferguson gathered himself up for a rush calculated to finish his opponent as he lay helpless against the supporting circle of watchers. Donalson, with the last atom of his will, side-stepped; and the river-man, fist, arm, and body shot past him, bringing up with a grunt against the onlookers.

Steadying himself, Donalson took a single step forward, and, as the river-man swung about, smashed his fist home to the cheek, with all the strength he could muster.

Ferguson's turning movement was abruptly halted. His head snapped back on its neck. All the force of his turning about had entered into the efficacy of the blow. The tormented cheek seemed to burst asunder, as the fire leaped through his nerves to his brain. He staggered a moment; then his eyelids snapped shut and he sank to the sawdust floor.

In the silence that followed the fall, Donalson staggered to the bar, procured a whisky bottle, and, prying open the river-man's lips he poured a generous bit between them. When the giant's eyes opened and he stumbled to his feet, he was but little weaker than Donalson, and together, clinging to each other for support, they staggered to the bar.

"How's your appetite for words," some one inquired from behind. Ferguson, leaning upon the counter, turned his head drunkenly.

"I'm—I'm man enough to eat 'em," he mumbled, "an' don't you forget it. But some day——"

"You'll get a worse lickin'," the other finished. "Better know when you're well off, Ferguson. He's got your gait and can hit you any time in the game."

Donalson brushed his arm across his dazed eyes, straightened his shoulders and called for drinks.

"Range up, old sawdusters," he mumbled, as he clung to the bar. "The drinks are on me. Everybody wants a drink, an'—an' I need one!"

The face of the bar was lined two deep.

When the glasses were filled, Donalson held up his liquor and laughed softly.

A huge jack, up from the Rogue country, swatted him resoundingly on the back.

"Here's to you, old sawduster," he said.

Donalson thrilled from head to foot. Sawduster! It was a rude, homely word, but as it came from the huge jack's lips it was invested with a connotation of wide spaces, huge trees, and mighty endeavor. Sawduster!

By nine o'clock Donalson was decently and politely drunk.

"Ferguson," he mumbled, leaning on the shoulder of the big river-man beside him, who had put a fresh cross of adhesive tape on his cheek. "I like you, old duster. I'm goin'—do you wan' to know what I'm goin' to do? I'm goin' to promote you. How'd you like to have charge of, hic, the big boom up-river?"

Ferguson, whose eye had long been turned to the up-river boom, stared blankly at the other.

"What in — you got to do with it, eh?"

"Me? Huh! I own it, Fergy. Own it and both these mills. Did you see the old doc up here today. Says I can go back to 'Frisco now. Sent me up here, cause my blood was run down. Said I needed a change of air. Blamed fool! Hic! Thought I was livin' too high. Used to be my dad's doctor and thinks he has to look after me. Says my blood's all right now. Say! Don't you want that job?"

"Fergy," who had stared blankly through this maudlin recital, finally nodded his head.

"All right, Fergy. See McDonald tomorrow morning. I'm goin' back to 'Frisco tomorrow. Got to get back. Can't leave a business to a bunch of clerks and flunkies. Let's have another, eh? Hic! An' shumebody shing!"

A little later they carried him, shamelessly but sweetly asleep, to the bunk-house and rolled him fondly upon his blankets. Then, in an unbeautiful chorus, the sawdust men attempted to render to music, one of the famous exploits of the famous John Bunyon. Which, in the land of sawdust, is the last word in honorable tribute.

At two o'clock in the morning, they still held forth, and the unhappily married bartender of the Triple Star saloon, passing the bunk-house on his way to his lonely cot-

tage heard the clamor and looked in at the open door. Whether the expression on his face was one of pity for the man who slept so peacefully in the bunk, or one of pity for himself and his lonely existence, the moonlight failed to reveal. But his lips said,

"Blamed fool! Busted up, all on account of a blamed female!"



AT ELEVEN-THIRTY next morning, Grover Donalson, mill owner, timekeeper, and sawdust man by truth of test, stood among his baggage on the little dock, awaiting the arrival of the launch to carry him up-river to meet the south-bound limited. In the distance sounded the ceaseless screech of the saws as they ate their way through the pine logs, and a faint odor of resinous sawdust was carried to his nostrils on the breast of a light breeze.

He gazed musingly across the river to the rolling foot-hills which rose tier upon tier until they finally melted into the great, somber mountains beyond. They were covered with silent, deep-green pines, lustily structured and stolid.

He sighed lightly and tried to turn his thoughts toward San Francisco and business, but each effort resulted the same way, and his mind came swinging back to the green woods before him, the screech of the saws, and the sharp aroma of pine pitch. Then, too, there came a picture of Coreen McGregor with her deep, penetrating gray eyes.

A hand was lightly laid upon his arm, and he turned to find himself looking into those very same eyes. She stood before him, face flushed and eyes sparkling, and, while she waited to speak, her hand held tightly to his arm.

"Grover," she whispered, stepping closer. "I've—I've just heard all—all about it. That you did it for me—to protect me. Oh, it was splendid, Grover!"

A misty warmth suffused her eyes, and a little pucker of wistful longing came between her brows.

"Grover, dear," she said softly, "I hoped that you could forgive me for what I said. Oh, I know that I called you a brawling beast; but I didn't know, Grover."

She waited another moment, her wistful eyes searching his immobile face, then, with a little catch in her breath, turned to go.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Grover. I hoped you

would forgive me and we could have gone away somewhere and you could get another job, and I'd—I'd find work, too. I'd do anything—anything to be near you."

Donalson caught her hands up quickly then.

"Then you didn't hear the whole story?" he demanded breathlessly.

"I heard why you did it," she choked, "and that you were going away. I didn't wait for more but came to find you."

Donalson stepped forward quickly.

"Then you don't know who I am?"

She shook her head.

"And you love me no matter who I am?"

A glad little cry escaped her lips.

"Yes, yes, Grover; I do!"

With a hungry cry he took her in his arms, and his gaunt, lonely features radiated warmly.

"Then we'll just take the boat for San Francisco together. No; never mind your clothes. We'll be married at Mapleson and get clothes there.

"Oh, we mustn't," she cried, leaning back from him, her eyes suddenly frightened. "That would be extravagant; and we must economize!"

Donalson laughed fondly above her head.

"No we don't, Coreen. You can have anything you wish."

"Grover! Who—who are you, dear?"

"Who am I?" he repeated. He stood thinking for a moment. Then, "I'm a saw-duster!" he said.



The NIGHT RIDER

by

W. A. MACDONALD



Author of "The Cashier"

AFTER a while almost every one who had occasion to ride often on Train 21 noticed that the same man occupied Lower Nine every night that they happened to ride. Very confidentially, the porter sometimes told his closest acquaintances that the man rode every night in the week.

This was at the time of the North Gulch hold-ups, and the porter didn't like it, though Jensen, the conductor, did not appear to be in the least alarmed. Some of the passengers, however, also had doubts and suspicions about the man. One of these was the very trim and efficient looking

McQuatters who said he was salesman for a firm of hardware and gun dealers.

"I'm not afraid for myself," he remarked. "I can shoot with the next man, and the firm has provided me with a neat machine for doing it."

He told this in the smoking-room, and exhibited, at some one's request, an automatic pistol known by the well-informed to be manufactured in small quantities—and likewise known not to be on the market.

"Who is the fellow?" asked the Yankee, Jones, who had pried into Western territory and made friends there with an Emersonian kindness unique among salesmen.

But McQuatters said he did not like the man who rode in Lower Nine, and didn't know much about him. In fact he disliked the man because he knew so little about him.

"It doesn't make a great deal of difference anyway," suggested Folsom, a business man plump with good living, but still occasionally on the road when he wanted to show his sales-force things about their business. "The conductor tells me we have been carrying an armed guard since the last hold-up, and he's looking for a chance to shoot every time the train slows down."

"Is that so?" commented McQuatters quickly, and then sat silent for a long time, pulling thoughtfully at his cigar.

"What are you smoking?" asked Jones.

"Me? Oh, new kind of poison," said McQuatters. "Some one gave it to me."

"Speaking of poison," said Folsom, resting his mind by thinking about the latest newspaper sensation, "did you read about the woman at Meadowfield who poisoned her husband and another man? The doctors know it was poison, but they can't find out what poison it was."

"Speaking of poison," said a quiet voice in the doorway. "Did you ever hear of wourali?"

It was the man from Lower Nine. McQuatters removed his cigar from his mouth and narrowed his lids. Jones sat up rather quickly in his chair.

Folsom scrutinized the stranger with a business eye. Nothing about the man indicated the unusual. He was clean-cut like McQuatters, of about the same size, rather lean and whipcordy of build and he had a pleasant, keen face, bronzed a little, and with traces of hardness. He found himself a place and lit a briar pipe.

"South American poison," he said. "The Macushi use it, both for arrows and blowpipe darts. Waterton brought back some from an expedition once and killed a sloth with a mere scratch of it, although the poison was fifty years old at the time." Darts tipped with it and shot from a blowpipe will kill sizeable monkeys at a considerable distance. Give a man a pretty sick time of it for a while, though it takes more than a dart to kill a man."

Abruptly McQuatters asked—

"Have you seen the guard?"

Immediately interest in the stranger increased.

"The guard?" questioned the man from Lower Nine. "No, is there a guard?"

Jones would have said that the man started. Later he wondered if he had not overtaxed his imagination.

"Company's expecting another hold-up," said Folsom.

"Well," commented the bronzed stranger slouching down comfortably, "an efficient guard ought to be able to stop that."

"I guess you don't know much about this gang," suggested McQuatters.

"Good guard ought to stop them," repeated the man who rode every night.

The blood rose darkly in McQuatters' face.

"I doubt if this railroad is capable of finding any one-man guard able to stand up against that gang," he said. "Look at Ferguson; he was a good man. Look at Wilmer; they thought he could shoot the eye out of any man that ever reached for a gun. Look at Dan Wetherell—courage, steady hand; and they said he had the drop on them, too."

"Some man like Taylor is what they need," declared Folsom, lighting a match.

"Who is Taylor?" inquired Jones with interest.

"Do you think Taylor would have a chance?" inquired McQuatters. "I don't. He may be a good man, and he sure has a reputation, but is he better than some of those other fellows that got shot to death? Now, if I——"

"If you what?" urged the man from Lower Nine quietly.

"If I owned that gang," continued McQuatters carelessly, "I'd almost go out of my way to meet Taylor. I think I could do some business with him."

"There's only one fallacy in what you say," commented the quiet man in the corner, exhaling a placid cloud of smoke.

"What is it?"

"Well, you see I know Taylor. He would never give you even a chance to start."

McQuatters' eyes became hard and glinting. He relighted his cigar. Then he appeared uninterested. But he listened.

"Taylor is ordinary enough," said the man from Lower Nine, "except in his choice of a profession. As a professional, free-lance gun-man I believe he is unique. He is an expert, that's all. He goes in for all the angles of his business just as you

gentlemen go in for yours. His line is dealing with crimes of violence and with criminals who habitually use violence. He takes only jobs that other people haven't been able to handle. There was that bank case in Denmore, for instance. The Halsey gang. They said that that was a typical Taylor job. He was called in when everybody else had failed."

"So he wouldn't give me a chance to begin?" said McQuatters.

"Not if you were in that line of business." McQuatters laughed.



THERE were few slow-downs that night, Number 21 having been previously delayed and now doing its best over a clear track to catch up to schedule time. McQuatters turned in exactly opposite the man in Lower Nine who had already gone to bed.

"Who the devil is he?" McQuatters asked himself, and, after a while, he put on his coat again to prowl through the car.

The close observer would have seen the lithe, tigerish play of the man's muscles wrinkling his coat. He came back, grimaced, after having swept aside the curtains of the compartment opposite the smoking-room for a brief second before apologizing for his mistake to the man who sat there in a corner, a short-barreled rifle beside his knee. That was the guard.

Not a sound came from Lower Nine. McQuatters, sighing with something like relief, took off his coat again.

Number 21, picking up, clicked its haste to the heavy rails. Having made its first stop at Thornton, outside of North Gulch, the train roared on again, the perpendicular walls of rock on either side throwing back the sound. McQuatters, apparently unable to sleep, wandered uneasily down the corridor again to where the guard held vigil in his curtained corner. As he entered the man started.

"I can't sleep," complained McQuatters. Suspicion died out of the guard's eyes.

"That's funny," he remarked. "I'm finding it hard to keep awake."

They were half-way through the gulch. A mile or so farther on the walls divided to make a narrow passageway leading to the hills.

"Glad you came in," said the guard good-humoredly. "If there's any place I specially want to keep awake it's here."

When McQuatters spoke his tone was sharp as steel and harsh as a file.

"What the devil's that?"

He pressed his face against the window. Startled by the tone the guard crowded him aside to peer into the pitch-black. He uttered a strangled cry. McQuatters swiftly choked him, bound the chloroformed pad in place, looped the man's wrists and ankles with fine, strong cord, and closed the curtains behind himself as he padded swiftly back to his berth.

The train whistled and slowed down. McQuatters peered forth from his curtains. In the car nobody moved but himself. Only when he turned his head to glance down the corridor, the curtains trembled at Lower Nine.

When McQuatters emerged again in half a dozen seconds his acquaintances of the smoking-room would not have known him. Looping up under the back of the black slouch-hat that came low on his forehead, a black silk handkerchief concealed his chin, mouth and nose, leaving only his eyes visible. His right hand contained the neat heavy automatic that he had exhibited in the smoking-room. The train had come to a full stop.

The curtains of Lower Nine trembled again and parted slightly; there was the slightest popping sound as if the smallest possible cork had been drawn from the most effervescent of tiny bottles.

McQuatters, who had moved so quickly and surely, hesitated queerly. He lifted his hand questioningly to his kerchiefed face and tried to look around. Then before he could find out what ailed him he began to sway slightly then drunkenly. The narrowed, glinting eyes looking out from between hat and mask widened and then grew blank.

Suddenly, darting from Lower Nine, there flashed another figure also masked and slouch-hatted. As McQuatters fell, the figure seized him, shoved him back through the curtains of his bunk, and swept the draperies closed. It was the man from Lower Nine. He commanded the corridor and he held an automatic in each hand.

Bursting through the doors at each end of the car came two others with an oath apiece. Outside a shot cracked.

"All right, chief; it's Fred outside," called an invader.

Heads began to appear from between the

curtains. The man from Lower Nine nodded at the information. Rough-handed, his men went down the line. Men and women passed out their treasures. A girl screamed chokingly, and fainted. Along the line one man made a sharp move in his berth, then stopped in stark realization, eyes panicky with fear.

"Don't do that again," gasped the man from Lower Nine.

"Plug him, chief," urged a bandit.

The chief shook his head.

Two of the bandits backed toward the doors watchfully. The third waved them on, and they turned and flashed to the ends of the car.

"Hold Fred there a minute," he shouted after them.

Then his voice changed and it drilled like steel.

"Jensen," he commanded the conductor, "bring that rope."

Jensen turned to the astounded passengers.

"If you want to see something," he said, "trail along."

But the masked man was half-way down the car and, before any one could recover from astonishment, they heard him call from the platform.

"Wait a minute," and then something else, and then a shot.

The men followed the conductor out, after one or two had hazarded a glance through the windows. There stood the three masked men, and before them stood the man from Lower Nine, the mask swept from his face. One of the three was nursing a bloody hand, and a gun lay on the ground at his feet. The face of the man from Lower Nine was carved deep with the lines of concentration.

"Drop the gun, Fred," he warned, "or I'll drill you, too."

Fred opened his hand without changing his position. And there was plenty of as-

sistance at hand when Jensen produced the ropes. Some one turned up with a bearded man in pajamas.

"Here's the doctor," he said.

He was needed. Both the wounded bandit and the guard needed him. When he had finished with them he turned to the man from Lower Nine.

"Do you know anything about wourali poison?" asked the latter.

"I know what it is, and what it does."

He took the doctor by the arm and they went along the corridor to the berth that was opposite Lower Nine. The doctor parted the curtains and looked in, but the other barred his way with one arm. He lifted the handkerchief of black silk that still lay across the man's face.

"Careful, doctor," he cautioned, holding up the handkerchief with the utmost care. Hanging from it was a slender dart no bigger than a quill, and terminated by half a dozen fine threads, as an arrow is terminated by feathers that keep it straight in its course.

Folsom looked over the doctor's shoulder at the man in the berth.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "It's McQuatters."

McQuatters opened his eyes.

"Where are the boys?" he asked, and the lids fell again when he knew. But after a while he gathered strength again, and curiosity.

"What happened to me?"

"Just a little poison," the doctor said. "We'll soon have you right."

"Poison!"

The eyes snapped open. Their glance fell on the quiet, slightly hard-featured face of the man who stood beside the doctor—the man from Lower Nine. They darkened with gathering hate.

"It's you is it?" said McQuatters. "It's you, is it, Taylor?"

"I told you I wouldn't give you a chance to begin," said Taylor.



The CHASE of the FOUR FOOLS

A THREE - PART STORY

CONCLUSION



by PATRICK and TERENCE CASEY

Authors of "The Story of William Hyde."

IN THE steaming jungles of Borneo we four were orchid-hunting. Fitzhamon was an Irish aristocrat; Koenraad de Jong, a Dutch orchid-chaser; I, Colum Kildare, a ne'er-do-well from San Francisco; and our boss-boy, Harry Christmas, a big liver-hued negro, a deserter from the U. S. Cavalry.

De Jong had an orchid-hunting commission and was our captain. But he loathed the business and we learned soon his real desire was to enter the Jallan Batoe, an extinct volcano, and steal from the primitive golden-skinned people who live there, their Green, Green God, a life-sized parrot, carved from solid emerald. Six years before I had heard the story of this Borneo race and their Green, Green God from William Hyde, a giant of a man with a blood-red beard, whom I found in Honolulu, a green parrot straddling his shoulder, working a shell-and-pea game that some day he might get money to return to the Jallan Batoe, where he swore he had once been.

And Hyde had told me of a golden-skinned Princess—she who had become his wife—and of *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, the Priestess whose love for him had poisoned to hate when he chose another for his bride. Then the Priestess had convinced the people that Hyde meant to steal their Green, Green God. And there followed an uprising against Hyde and his Princess.

The red-bearded giant had escaped from

the Jallan Batoe with only his life. Every couple of years he had tried to open up a tunnel into the Jallan Batoe, but the only entrance had been choked by a land-slide.

All this I remembered there in the jungle when suddenly upon our ears came the same rigmarole I had heard Hyde use while banking his shell game. De Jong, drunk, recognized it too and his mad desire to follow the mysterious voice led to a pitched battle with Fitz and me against De Jong and Christmas. Their game was to rid themselves of us forever, and they pitched me overboard and went on up the river.

I gained the shore and stumbled through the bush to a clearing, where I suddenly came upon a Dyak chief whom I knew to be a head-hunter. I evaded him and went on.

Jungle madness came upon me, and in it I saw about me troops of Tartar horsemen from Asia, the remnant of that great expedition of Genghis Khan which had invaded Borneo; suffered defeat and, cut off from the coast, sought refuge in the Jallan Batoe. It was from them that the golden-skinned race living there had descended.

Then my senses returned. I had almost walked into a band of head-hunters, toasting three human heads over a slow fire. They chanted about a Green, Green God, a Golden Woman, and a field of singing Sacred Stones. They implored their god to take away this Golden Woman who, it seemed, had come into their land.

Then out of the jungle stepped the Golden Woman herself and the savages fled. I knew in an instant she was *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, the Priestess.

She turned and disappeared. I followed her.

In a tiny glade I found not the Priestess but a very young girl, her face upturned, coaxing in English a great green parrot to come down out of a tree—the parrot Mogul I had seen on Hyde's shoulder in Honolulu. At once I guessed the truth—the girl had William Hyde's red hair; she was his daughter. It was now eighteen years since he first had entered the Jallan Batoe and wooed and won as his bride the Marshal Queen of the Poonan, Golden Feather of Flame.

I was right. The maid told me how her father had at last returned to the Jallan Batoe, bringing the parrot with him—returned to his wife, who had been made a slave.

The Poonan feared the parrot Mogul, believing it a god, and while it lived with Hyde and his family in their hut, they were safe. Meanwhile the girl's father had planned to regain his old position of Marshal King. But there had come a night when it rained and roared without, and Mogul had disappeared.

Lip-Plak-Tengga, who had caused the girl's mother to be made a slave and who feared her father, had learned of the parrot's disappearance. Taking advantage of this, she had ordered Hyde brought to the stone temple or *Dobo*. And when he returned to his daughter he was a man who crawled. He had been hamstrung—the cords under his knees severed.

The blow had killed the girl's mother. But before the Priestess could incite the Poonan to further devilry, Mogul had returned.

Then the girl told me of seeing my comrades heading toward the Jallan Batoe and she explained why she had broken the Poonan law that no one should leave the Jallan Batoe.

It seemed Mogul had again disappeared. This time *Lip-Plak-Tengga* was also missing. The Priestess had kidnaped the bird and the girl had followed and found it.

Hyde's daughter turned to me with pitiable entreaty:

"Already *Lip-Plak-Tengga* may have returned," she breathed. "She will stir up again in the Poonan their slumbering hatred

for my fathaire. And this time they will kill him.

"Come, come. For the love of that God about whom my fathaire taught me, let us hasten. Let us get Mogul back to my fathaire, and all may yet be well."

She took the lead through the jungle. Suddenly we spied Harry Christmas in a little glade and he was talking with the head-hunters.

Carefully avoiding him, we went on and soon picked up Fitz and De Jong, who had been deserted by their black boys, and De Jong had gone blind.

Then Harry Christmas appeared. Both Fitz and I suspected treachery, feared that he meant to lead those head-hunters into the Jallan Batoe, but we had no proof.

So our party started on through the tunnel that led into the land of the Poonan. We caught Christmas halting and looking back several times and at last put our suspicions up to him straight.

"Lawdy, boss, dem head-hunters never come near here. No, no; dey am too skeered!" he burst out. But still we did not believe him.

At last we came out into the sunlight. Far ahead rose the cliff-like walls of the crater which encircled us. Down along the Avenue of Palms we walked, past the great hollow stone images, carved in the form of animals, in which the Poonan lived. All was still, everything deserted. At the Elephant Cave we found no trace of William Hyde.

"They have taken him to the great Stone *Dobo*—they are torturing him!" sobbed the girl.

On down the avenue we rushed. She was right. For the great *Dobo* was filled to overflowing with golden-skinned men and women.

Fitz led the way unflinchingly into the stone cavern. Then it was the Poonan saw the parrot Mogul. They gasped:

"That bird that is like the Green, Green God has returned for a second time! The bird himself is some great god."

Down thereat upon their knees they went before the girl and parrot. And then we found William Hyde—found him upon that throne from which he had once ruled the Poonan and where they had now placed him for torture. But the return of Mogul had saved him and the bird flew to his shoulder while the Poonan looked on in awe.

Hyde squinted through the torchlight at Fitz and then exclaimed:

"Fitzhamon! It's Fitzhamon of British North Borneo—and the 'Frisco lad to whom I told my story six years ago!"

De Jong broke in with his insane voice:

"*Mein*, der Green, Green God is *mein!* All der vay I came up der Barito for id. Give id to me——"

But I stopped his raving.

"Some of us came for the emerald god and riches," I told Hyde, nodding at the negro and De Jong. "But Fitz and I have come to help you get out."

"I'll be glad of your aid," Hyde replied. "I've a score to settle with these Poonan. They worked my wife to death as a slave. And these broken legs of mine, hocked, hamstrung, ruined. The devils! But still I have my daughter——"

He stopped suddenly. For into the dobo rushed a Poonan who waved his sword aloft and cried:

"The *Orang-Benua!* The head-hunters! They are in the Jallan Batoe!"

Harry Christmas leaped into galvanic life. He danced about the dais.

"Ah knowed it!" he howled in glee. "Ah tole dem to come on. Dey am gwine to take de heads of all de Poonan. We are to help dem. An' de Green, Green God am to be ourn!"

CHAPTER XIX

HYDE'S REVENGE AND LIP-PLAK-TENGGA'S

THE Poonan had been chilled speechless by the dread news. Now they found tongue.

"To arms, to arms!" cried the women, fluttering to their feet like a flight of frightened doves.

"*Tung moolong!*" came from the men along the walls. "To the tunnel, to the tunnel!" And, brandishing swords, *kliaus* and long *sumpilans*, they streamed out through the deep pillared doorway.

The priests at our back followed. I saw one, holding the sharp tapering point of the *Mandau* of Genghis Khan, drop that improvised dagger at the foot of the old rug at the rear of the dais, leap across the dais and spring clear over the white stone balustrade and down the stairs. The women followed. In a tremendous shout, all cried:

"*Hee-ah! Hee-ah!*"

That was the war cry of the Poonan which slips in echoes through interminable distances of windless air. It rang now, peal upon peal, echo upon eery echo, through the vast cave and back, in rolling reverberation, from the remote recesses of the cave. And it wavered with a mighty note of fear. Never since the Dyaks had vanquished the armies of Genghis Khan had the Poonan faced such an awful situation. To the Poonan as a people, now, this invasion of the head-hunters was a matter of life and death.

As a people, one and individual, all the Poonan to the last man and woman answered that war cry. All save the Gunner. Stoically, as if unmoved by the clamor outside and within the *Dobo*, he still remained behind Hyde. He was standing by his friend in this time of dismaying trouble, as once heroically, he, had stood by him in that time of torture and travail.

Above all that din, I heard Hyde shouting. His usually pale face was red, now, with intense excitement and with the exertion of trying to make himself heard.

"We don't help them!" he was vociferating. "We help neither head-hunters nor Poonan. It's our chance to get away!"

I missed Christmas suddenly. He was no longer dancing about. I saw him, bent over one of the *kliaus*. He was sifting the jewels on that *kliau* through his fingers. He was scooping up in his big black hands the uncut and unset gems as a croupier scoops up the yellow gold on a roulette table. His eyes were brilliant as the eyes of a lynx, shining with greediness. Feverishly he was stuffing all those loose diamonds and pearls, rubies, emeralds and sapphires into the hip and side pockets of his erstwhile olive-drab riding-breeches.

An unwholesome avarice welled up within me. I looked, with a conscious greediness, at those jewels and, with startling vividness, I thought of all the luxuries those jewels could buy, out in the world. I leaned over toward one of the overtaxed shields. I thought to put a few diamonds, rubies and pearls into my own pockets.

I felt De Jong's hand tremble and pull in mine. I snapped erect, apprehensively, and looked about. The *Dobo* was wholly empty, by now, of all the Poonan, though their clamor still held outside. I found De Jong beside me, his head on one side. He was harkening to that clamor like a bird in a storm:

I realized, then, that in his enforced darkness he could not comprehend what it was all about. He was afraid lest I should leave him. And he was dumfounded by all the noise outside. He was terribly frightened.

There was something contagious in his fear. Temporarily, his trembling hand had served to stop me from taking some of the jewels. Now, his fearfully alert and helpless attitude put a full quietus to my avarice and had the effect of showing me plainly how helpless we all were. We were helpless to get out of the Jallan Batoe, we were powerless against the head-hunters. No longer did I think of stealing even a few jewels. I thought only of hitting upon some way out, some means whereby we might escape, empty-handed but alive.

I drew De Jong by one trembling hand nearer Hyde. Hyde was speaking.

"The Poonan," he was saying in explanation, "had all crowded into this *Dobo*. In the desire of every last one of them to witness my death, they crowded into this *Dobo* and, for the first time in their history, left the entrance to the Jallan Batoe entirely unguarded. Just as you walked without challenge inside, just so did the head-hunters walk inside. Hear them?"

There was no need to listen. Swelling up outside, in a mighty roar like the beating of waves on a rock-buttressed coast, came, as if from a thousand throats, the war-cry of the head-hunters:

"*Hoo-ah! Hoo-ah!*"

It was like the rumble of thunder echoing through and through the crater.

"There must be several tribes of them," said Fritz, judging from the sound. "As many as a thousand head-hunters!"

"Lawdy, yas!" said Harry Christmas knowingly.

He jerked from its holster, as he spoke, his savage automatic, laid it upon the flooring of the dais beside his Sharp rifle, and stuffed into that holster a small green jade with two white eyes of pearls, a snake of strung emeralds in its one hand, and a ball of ruby in the other.

"Sho', dere am all ob two t'ousand head-hunters," he went on. "Dere am de *Loeang Benua an'* all de tribes right daown to de Ribber Korouw. Ten tribes ob two hundred men apiece, Ah raiken—two t'ousand head-hunters!"

Hyde clutched with both hands at the

shield under him and his face went white as his clenched knuckles, his snowy mat of beard, very white.

"Two thousand head-hunters!" he breathed in a cold whisper of awe. "My revenge—my revenge at last! The Poonan never can stop them, they never can drive them out! This is the end of the Poonan, of the Jallan Batoe!"

"Come on, come on!" urged Fitz. "Don't stand around like a trip of dottrels—as the Poonan did—waiting for the head-hunters to come right in on you. Come on. Maybe we can get by through the growths, and, unobserved, out of the Jallan Batoe."

"Don't yo' feah, Mistah Fitz," said the negro, not pausing this time in the engrossing business of knotting up, within the folds of a bandanna, a heap of jewels. "Dose head-hunters am all right. Dey knows ole Harry Christmas. Didn't Ah fix it all up foh dem?"

He could not refrain from looking up, with the question, to enjoy the effect upon us of this evidence of his generalship.

"We'll walk right t'rough dem," he added. "Jes' yo' wait, Mistah Fitz, till Ah gives de word. Dey knows ole Harry Christmas, Ah tells yo'. Ah'll tote yo' right t'rough dem. Jes' yo' wait."

"Wait!" ejaculated Fitz with an oath. "We'll wait on no double-dealing nigger like you. You played us double in the matter of these head-hunters; it may turn out to our good fortune; but we'll take no more chances on you playing us double again."

He turned to Hyde who, thus far, had not even so much as attempted to remove himself from that Nine-Times-Nine Throne.

"Can you make it, Hyde?" he asked.

Hyde nodded as if in answer, though from the look in his eyes I believed his mind was engaged with other things.

"Colum," Fitz added to me, quickly making arrangements for the escape, "you, lad, take care of the Dutchman. The girl will follow me and look to her father. Now, come." And drawing his .45 Colt, the one-stringed fiddle still in his left hand, and seemingly forgotten by him in the excitement, he started on a run for the balustrade as though to make a flying leap over it.

The voice of Hyde halted him. Hyde still squatted upon the throne, his mind working rapidly and farseeingly, the while his ruined body remained as immovable as the body of a dying man upon his bed.

His voice, coming from the deeps of his chest, rang out startlingly and echoed away and away through the empty *Dobo*.

"Not that way!" he commanded. "Go behind this rug at my back. There is a passage in the wall behind it. It leads out through the carved hoof of one of the hind legs of this stone, and into the growths behind the temple. Go that way. The head-hunters will never see you. Wait! I—I will show you the way!"

He lifted himself on his hands with the words, and, his legs dragging under him, leaped down like a frog, and with an uncanny speed, ran on those hands toward the rug behind, the parrot Mogul bobbing and clinging desperately to his shoulder, pointed wings fluttering wildly in an attempt to keep his balance.

I noticed, of a sudden, as he made toward the rug, that the dagger-like point of the Sword of Genghis Khan was missing from the foot of that rug where the priest, in his flight, had cast it. The disappearance quite startled me. Yet I was given no time to determine where it might have gone to.

The girl was following at Hyde's back, Fitz thrusting her ahead, and I, not a jump behind Fitz, dragging the Dutchman by one hand, my other on the butt of my little Iver-Johnson. Still, withal, I managed to find opportunity to look back for Harry Christmas. I thought he might have picked up the dagger-like point, and, prizing it for the inlay of gold along its concave back, stuck it into his belt.

The negro was behind me. But there was no dagger-like point of sword stuck in his belt; he bore no weapon of any kind. His Savage automatic, and Sharp .50 rifle lay below one of the *kliaus*. His pockets bulged. He carried in one hand a knotted bandanna filled with jewels, while a pearl-eyed green jade idol protruded from the holster where the Savage automatic should have been. Even as I looked, he passed between the throne and the eighth *kliau*, and as he passed, swept from that *kliau* into the crook of his right arm, the Green, Green God!

The Gunner behind him, bringing up the rear, halted abruptly at the negro's action, and his slant eyes spread with a look of horror. Two screams burst on the membrane of my ears. They came not from the Gunner, but from ahead. One was the scream of Mogul, dashing about and about in the air as if distracted, cawing hoarsely and

frantically. The other was a woman's scream, a scream of demoniac hate.

I looked ahead, toward the rug. Hyde had paused, and set himself down upon his dragging limbs, in order to release one hand from under him with which to lift the trailing bottom of the rug. He had lifted the rug. He had disclosed, behind that rug, a woman crouched. She it was who had screamed with hate. She was *Lip-Plak-Tengga*.

She leaped up as I looked. In her right hand, like a dagger, was that missing half of the Sword of Genghis Khan—the sharp tapering point. With that sharp tapering point as with a dagger, she stabbed to the heart the helpless Hyde.

Hyde screamed, louder than the constant cawing of the parrot—the scream of a man mortally wounded—an awful scream. His hand dropped from the rug; the rug fell into place, concealing the hate-distorted face of the priestess; and he snapped backward so far I could see the glittering dagger of sword fleshed in his left side.

His scream broke off. He felt for the gun at his belt—his old trusty .38 on its .45 frame. His face livid to the throat, his nostrils fluttering with dying gasps like paper in the wind, the rigid set of his jaws accentuating the agony and terrible strength of his face, he shot, twice in quick succession, through that rug.

The gun fell from his limp hand, his face convulsed, he pitched forward—dead. Those two sharp cruel cracks echoed and re-echoed through the empty cavern; the cawing of the parrot sobbed away; all was still.

We could not move. Whether he had killed or wounded *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, whether she had been or not been behind that rug as he fired we did not know. Horror was on us then like the cold hand of paralysis, chilling our blood, robbing us of breath, riveting us to the spot—making us, all in all, like stone-graven images. We could not move.

CHAPTER XX

REVELATIONS

THE man leaped by us like a wounded animal seeking cover. And like a wounded animal he moaned aloud in an agony of soul. He was the Gunner.

He lifted up the rug. There on the white

flooring behind the rug lay *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, fatally wounded, the shimmering silver of the pheasant feathers over her breasts incarnadined by blood, her right hand creased, from gripping the sharp blade of the dagger, by a red line of wound.

The sight loosed from me the cold shackles of horror, but it was more the realization of the faithful Gunner's anguish of soul which sped through my veins, now, a burning overwhelming fire of pity. As the Gunner picked the dying High Priestess up in his arms, I sprang forward and, in an effort to aid him, I held up the rug from off his shoulders.

The Gunner knelt on one knee. *Lip-Plak-Tengga* rested in his arms, her proud white face with its frame of storm-black hair pillowed upon his shoulder. The Gunner's continuous moaning rose into a piteous plea.

"Do not die, do not die, *Lip-Plak-Tengga!*"

There seemed no flutter of heart beneath that feathery gown; the thin sequins of gold in the sensitive nostrils of her classic nose were without any movement of breath. Yet slowly now, at the Gunner's plea, she opened her eyes. And she gasped, in Poonan:

"Why—why should I live?"

She looked down at the form of Hyde, spread-eagled on his face and very still before her, and it seemed to me that a kind of sorrow flooded her eyes. A tremor of shuddering swept through her. In her brown eyes there germinated, then slowly grew and grew, a wondrous shining light. And she took a great breath, and in Poonan she cried:

"I loved him! I killed him in a fit of hate, yet I loved him. Because through all these years he never has looked toward me, because just now he was about to leave me forever, I killed him. But through all these years, I loved him.

"I persecuted him, yes; but every persecution was to hide the love that cankered my heart. I tortured him I loved; every torture he suffered was agony to my body and soul; and still, withal, I went through with it. He did not know, and it was not for me to say. I could not turn back. I loved him, *ahel* And I killed him. Why, why should I live?"

Her eyes closed weakly. The Gunner held her to him.

"Live, live, Flower of the Silver Star!" his voice wailed. "Live for me! I love you! Through all the years since we were children together, from afar I have worshiped you. Live for me! I love you!"

A beautiful smile shaped about her pallid lips. After a little, she opened her eyes. And there was in her eyes, then, a great sadness.

"It is the end of the world, *Tumbuk Ladda*," she sighed. "For me, for you, for all the Poonan. Our Paradise on Earth is no more."

Her breath caught, the gold sequins in her nostrils drew in, her bosoms heaved and, with the pain of gasping for air, a dying spasm shivered through her form. The Gunner held her gently.

"But maybe," she gasped with great effort, and her eyes opened with a sad smile, "maybe—in that other Paradise—above—we shall meet. And perhaps—there—we shall love—those—who love—us——"

Her voice faded away in a deep sigh, her eyes closed heavily and, with that sigh, her lips parted like a baby's. Thus as she had come into the world—with lips slightly parted—so she went out of the world.

How long we stood and gazed down at the dead, I have no means of knowing. I saw the parrot, Mogul, flutter down from some perch above and alight upon the form of Hyde and walk up his back toward the bulge of one shoulder. I shivered.

A gasp like the gasp of a person rudely awakened, came from beside me. I turned. It was not the awe-stricken Dutchman. Butterfly of the Dark it was, her little hands clenched terrifically tight at her sides, her face like some alabaster death-mask in which two great eyes had been turned, by the spell of horror, into frigid green pools. Just as her little clenched hands opened and went before her and she would have fallen beside the dead form of her father, I caught her in my arms.

"You can do no good now, Butterfly of the Dark," I whispered soothingly. "Your father is dead. His sufferings are over. It is best that we go away."

An involuntary trembling shook her.

"Ah, yes," she said in an icy whisper, nodding ever so slowly; "it is best that we go away. Yet give me, I beg of you, one moment with my dead."

She knelt down then, and brushing aside

the parrot, her father's old faithful buddie, she turned up her father's death-whitened face and kissed his cold brow. She bowed her head as in prayer.

I turned away; Fitz turned away; and we did not seek to break in upon the sacredness of that moment.

After a while, the girl stood up. Her eyes seemed suddenly old with all she had seen in the past few minutes, and lived through. Yet she said, very bravely:

"Let us go. And let us go that way behind the rug which my fathaire directed. It is one of the many passages of the stone *Dobo*. It leads, one way, to the grottoes where dwells the Monster Man and, the other, out through the rear of this stone into the growths behind. I learned the windings of it as a child when the *Dobo* was my playground. *Keha*; come, and I shall lead you."

We passed behind the rug. Behind, in the white stone wall of the cavern, showed an arched opening. As we stepped into it, I suddenly bethought myself of the Gunner still kneeling there, on the white flooring, the beautiful High Priestess in his arms, his form rocking from side to side in dumb agony.

I left our line of refugees—the negro carrying the Green, Green God in the crook of his right arm, Fitz dragging the awed Dutchman by the hand, and all following the girl. I stepped over to the Gunner and laid a sympathetic hand upon his shoulder.

"Come with us, O *Adjie Tumbuk Ladda*," I said in Poonan. "You were the faithful friend of him who just has died; you shall be our friend. Do not stay here to be slain by the *Orang Benua*. Do not stay here with *Lip-Plak-Tengga*; she is dead, you can do her no good now. Come with us, Chieftain Long Knife—with Butterfly of the Dark who is the daughter of your old friend."

He only shook his head. It was a sorrowful, mute answer. It was none the less final, irrevocable.

I felt lost, for a moment, as to just what to do. I looked down at Hyde's spread-eagled form. As I did, the parrot Mogul resettled upon the bulge of Hyde's shoulder; his head drooped and his beak of a face took on an owl-like gravity, a pitiable animal expression of sorrow. I turned and, leaving the parrot and the Gunner guarding their dead, alone I entered the dark of the passage behind the rug.

Long afterward, it seemed to me, I could hear the Gunner moaning to himself. That moaning rang loud in my ears, as I pursued the passageway; louder than all the war-cries of those thousands of Poonan and head-hunters, battling outside. It was a moaning that was worse even than terrible, that was inarticulate, that was nothing human—that was like the keening of a starved animal, like the wailing of a lost soul.

CHAPTER XXI

"Lari ka ribut nemu ujan, lari ka sungkup nemu pendam."

(Running from the rain, he encounters the typhoon; running from a tombstone, he finds himself in a graveyard.)

Poonan Proverb.

NOW, AS I went through the passage, I began to think that the moaning which rang in my ears came not from the Gunner at all. The more I progressed through the passage, the more that moaning increased in volume and hideousness. Certainly, then, it could not come from the Gunner whom I was leaving, with every step, farther and farther behind. No; it came from ahead, from some point ahead toward whence I was making.

I had remarked that there was nothing human in that moaning. It was like the keening of a starved animal. Well, I thought, now, that it might in truth be the keening of some starved animal, the moaning of some wounded animal.

I began to know fear. Had I stumbled, in the darkness of the passageway, into some ramification of that passageway, some branching passage which led to the grottoes of the Monster Man?

I looked about me with a nervous apprehension. There was no ray of light behind to show out that arched entrance by which I had come into the passage. In the convolutions of the passage, I had made several twists and turns, and now all was so dark about me that not even could I make out the stony whiteness of the passage walls. I was in a darkness, inky and pitchy, thick as jelly, and which shook like jelly with the quaverings of that hideous moaning.

I sniffed the air. Breathing, on the sudden, into my nostrils was a peculiar odor. It was an animal odor, like that odor which is inseparable from horses in the ardor of

their toil. And yet was it more offensive than that. It was fetid as the stench of rats in the heat of their gnawing, of bats in the stuffiness of night. It was a rancid odor, pungently dry. It was the odor of an ape, of that huge orang-utan called the Monster Man.

I had stumbled into the passage leading to his grottoes.

The continuous moaning grew louder. Even as I paused to sniff the air and attempt to look about me, that moaning grew nearer, more hideous. The creature, wounded or starved, which uttered it, was coming toward me. I had no doubts. The Monster Man it was. He had been wounded, perhaps, in some encounter with the head-hunters. He was coming, for a surety, toward me.

I turned and through the blackness in a terrified hurry, rounding bend after turn, my hands outreaching and rubbing along either wall with such speed, such friction, that the skin seemed burned from them—back the way I had come, I fled.

The moaning ended abruptly, as if some new exertion, some sudden need of breath upon the part of the creature uttering it, had estopped its continuation. I ran on. I feared what that new exertion might be. I feared that the Monster Man was pursuing me.

All at once, in the distinct silence that was punctuated only by the ringing of my footfalls upon the stone pavement, I caught the heavy *flop* as of naked, ponderous, running feet. I knew then. Upon his ponderous prehensile feet that were bare of hair and padded like a man's, the Monster Man was running in pursuit of me.

I thought, on the instant, of stopping and, despite the dark, attempting to shoot him. But Hyde had thought to shoot this very ape, eighteen years before; he *had* shot him, lodging two steel-jacketed bullets in his tremendous bulk; and it had proved no use.

The ape had got Hyde. He had broken Hyde's arm, sunk his long fingers into the flesh of Hyde's middle, hurled Hyde through the air and slap down upon his face. Now, after eighteen years, he was still alive, colossally alive. My little Iver-Johnson would prove no use. He would get me!

I shouted distractedly. I shouted in a mad effort to locate my party and gain their aid. My voice crashed in echoes

about my ears. I ran on and continued to shout.

And yet I thought to hear, amid all those shouts and echoes, that heavy *flop* of naked feet running ponderously behind me. And it seemed to me that, fast as I ran and ever as I ran, there was always, close at my heels, that Monster Man, his huge bulk squeezng through the narrow passage, lurching and brushing clumsily from wall to wall, his hot breath singeing the hair on my neck.

A mote of light burst out ahead. It grew into a tiny flaming exclamation point, wavered as in a draft, then flickered away into nothingness. There was a repetition of the phenomenon—another mote of light leaping into tiny flame. It was for all the world as if some one ahead was striking matches, repeatedly striking matches.

I sucked the shouts down my throat. I ran on. I heard a soft and continuous swearing. A fourth match burst into flame and I saw, leaping into highlights and shadows in the glow of that match, the thin clever face of Fitz, his gray eyes harassed as by some great anxiety.

In a strange commingling of mad joy and of that dependency born of fear, I shouted: "Fitz! The Monster Man! He's right behind me!"

Hypnotized by the very sincerity of my fear, I turned, with the utterance, and looked behind. And behold! There behind, not four yards behind, was indeed the Monster Man!

I saw him in the light of the match. An immense orang-utan, upreared upon his short, huge and hairy legs, his little round eyes glittering snakily from under bushy brows, his bare face and beardless prognathous chin stuck forward, his head rolling on a thick neck from side to side, his whole tremendous shaggy-haired body filling the passage and rolling from side to side, as he lurched clumsily toward me.

He was over seven feet tall, and five feet wide, and three feet, no less, from back to front. The shaggy hair over the great triceps of his left arm was red with blood where he had been wounded in the fighting, no doubt, by the poisoned arrows of the head-hunters. And both those long heavy-thewed hairy arms were pressed out along either wall like the feelers of a bug in a confined earth-run, the ham-like paws sliding along the walls toward me with a speed uncanny, a groping aspect horrible to see.

I whirled round to leap away. I noted with the action, glittering a kind of dull malignant blue in Fitzhamon's right hand, the .45 Colt. In the other hand, where flared the match, was that one-stringed fiddle. Fitz still held on to that one-stringed fiddle.

I exclaimed in dismay:

"It's no use, Fitz! You can't kill him—"

A fiber of flame spit out. A sharp crack, a single scream, drowned my words and shattered the close air of the passage. That scream was the scream of the ape. It was frightful. He lurched back, screaming, rocking from side to side, his long arms closing in like folding antennæ, his great hands pressing the wound in his chest, where Fitz had plugged him, as if to stop the flow of blood.

We turned. Precipitantly we fled.

CHAPTER XXII

NEITHER TO BE LENT NOR BORROWED

FITZ plucked at my sleeve. We had come to a bend in the passage.

"This way," he said. "Here's where you got off the main line."

He turned to the right, swinging around the bend and pulling me by the sleeve after him. We ran on. The screaming of the ape faded with distance. From ahead we caught the guttural tones of the Dutchman.

"They're awaiting us ahead in the dark of the passage," said Fitz; "De Jong, the negro and Butterfly of the Dark."

I could not see them, such was the darkness of the passage. But distinctly, above the distance-dulled screaming of the ape, I could hear the guttural tones of the Dutchman.

"Dot screaming," he was saying. "Id is like der screaming of der sick ape. I know dot. 'Cause why? 'Cause vunce I an ape got, a pig hairy deffel *satyrus*, for der *Hamburgische Gesellschaft*. Dose arms on id was down to der ankles. I swear, der ankles. A grade hairy deffel peast. Id was der magnificent specimen."

"Bud oudt from der Mahakkam on der Straits of Macassar he got nostalgia, vot you calls der homesick. Der awful smell of der *durians*, dey come no longer on der preeze from Borneo. Und he shakes der bars of der cage; he break a bar, mit a sound shush like dot bistol-crack ve heard; und he

scream und scream. *Herr Gott!* How he scream! All der night und in der day sum-dimes.

"Dot orang, he neffer reach Batavia. He be grade hairy deffel *satyrus* mit chest like der tom-tom, but he scream und dies of der homesick. I tells you sumdings. All der life dies. Bud emeralds—emeralds don't dies. Dey is always green—oof!"

We slapped, in the dark, full against the Dutchman, rudely interrupting him and forcing the breath from his body.

"I beg your pardon, Conrad," Fitz managed to say.

We drew up, puffing for breath. I could see neither the Dutchman, the negro, nor the girl; but the little exclamation she gave vent to, now, at Fitz's apology, was unmistakable. It thrilled me. It was tremulous as with joy.

"Ooh!" she exclaimed. "You have found him! That is good. I thought Mister Colum might have stumbled into the hands of the Monster Man. But—but what was that sharp noise we heard?"

"Fitz taking a shot at the Monster Man," I answered. "He just stopped that ape from getting me."

There in the dark, as she crowded near us, she seemed to shudder.

"Then you did," she burst out in a shaken voice, "then you did stumble upon the Monster Man! Ooh, I thought it was he we heard moaning. I still seem to hear him shrieking and screaming far off."

"Yes," I returned. "He was moaning. I believe he was in the fight with the head-hunters and got wounded. The hair on his left arm near the shoulder was matted with blood. I guess a poisoned arrow entered his triceps. He must have pulled it out."

"Well, anyhow, I did for him," spoke up Fitz, a note of finality in his voice.

"I don't know about that," I qualified. "These men of the jungle don't die so easily."

"Ah raiken yo' am 'bout right, Mistah Colyum," interposed the negro who hitherto had been an interested but silent audience. I could faintly make out his eyes, now, gleaming catlike in the dark.

"What do you mean, Christmas?" asked Fitz with a sharpness that hinted of irritation.

"Wal," drawled the negro, his eyes moving, "ole Harry hain't fohgot dat orang-utan he done shot wid his Sha'p rifle when

we fust come into de jungles. While we bumped each other in de bresh a-tryin' to find him, dat ape kicked 'bout wid t'ree half-inch bullets in his hide, one ob dem in his nose. Dat ape lived quite a spell, Mistah Fitz. Dey don't die easy."

This recollection of the negro excited in me a renewal of my fears. Incited by those fears, nervously I looked about me in the darkness.

"And remember Hyde, too," I said, the while. "Hyde took two shots with his .38 at this ape, eighteen years ago, and never feazed him. I tell you, Fitz, you stopped him, but you didn't kill him. They don't die so easily."

Fitz grunted as in disgust.

"You don't hear him screaming any longer, do you?" he insisted.

Truly enough, as we gave ear now, we could no longer hear even the distance-dulled screaming of the ape. There was only, breathing through the darkness, a faint murmuring as from the Poonan and head-hunters battling afar off.

Yet the irritation and insistency upon the part of Fitz was, in this matter, a cause of wonder to me. Fitz was not the man to underestimate a foe and, of a certainty, not so formidable a foe as the Monster Man. I could not account for his present persistency. I thought he might be attempting, perhaps, to abate our fears, in a great-hearted willingness to bear those fears, single-handed and alone, upon his own shoulders.

However, even to hearten the girl, I could not see the wisdom of such a policy. In a time of danger, ignorance is anything but bliss. I decreed such a policy. I said:

"That explains nothing, Fitz. The Monster Man was moaning, with the pain of his arrow wound, when I stumbled into his passage. But once he got scent of me and started after me, abruptly he ceased moaning. This I know, Fitz: If the trail be warm, the quarry near, he'll forget to scream in his savage desire to come upon us."

The while I spoke, all the while I looked about me, my fears growing apace.

"Come on," I urged. "Let's get out of here. He may be following us, and we not know. Let's get out into the day where we can see."

I shoved Fitz before me, thus encouraging him to lead the way and so get the party started. He fell in with my idea with un-

expected promptness. As he took the lead and I passed the negro in the dark, to slip in behind the girl, the left elbow of the boss-boy jabbed me in the side. I knew, thereat, that Christmas had shifted, in the wait, the Green, Green God from his right arm to the crook of his left arm. He was carrying the knotted bandanna of jewels, now, in his right hand.

"Yo' hol' tight to mah belt, Mistah De Young," he admonished the Dutchman.

Whether the Dutchman heard him or not, I could not tell. The Dutchman was muttering to himself. As we went on and all was stillness about us, save for the regular fall of our feet upon the stone pavement and the faint murmuring in the air, I chanced to catch a snatch of his muttering.

"Dot Vilhelm Hyde," he was saying as if to himself, "dot Vilhelm Hyde is deadt. Der High Bristess of der Poonans who guarded der Green, Green *Gott*, is deadt. All der Poonans vill soon be deadt. Der Green, Green *Gott* pelongs to me, den. Gif me dot. Der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies."

De Jong did not know, to be sure, that immediately before him Christmas was carrying, in the crook of his left arm, the Green, Green God. De Jong could not see. He believed that when Mogul had flown from his shoulder, then had he lost the Green, Green God.

Since that occurrence, happening as it did amid all the to-do in the *Dobo*, he had been very quiet, as if indeed he had been struck speechless with terror and dismay. Now, however, in this simple business of going on through the passage, his abnormal avarice for the Green, Green God seemed to have swept back upon him in a flood. He muttered and mumbled incessantly.

I thought to quiet him. I nudged the boss-boy as he followed, at my heels, through the dark.

"Let De Jong carry it," I whispered meaningly. "It's only a little point, but it will keep him from going altogether crazy. Once we get outside in the day, you can take it back."

Readily enough, the negro understood what it was I meant. He had a ready answer for me.

"But, lawdy, Mistah Colyum," he objected in a cautious whisper, "dat Dutchman cayn't see. He has plenty to do jes'

to hol' onto me. Better let ole Harry Christmas tote it foh a while, boss—jes' foh a li'l while."

What could I do? The god was not mine to lend or borrow. Plain it was that, by right of theft and possession, it was the negro's to do with as he pleased. He did not please, just then, to do as I asked. Yet would it be impolitic of me, now, to admit my failure.

I said something about, "After a while, then, outside," and I turned on my heel and went on. And the incessant muttering of the Dutchman continued to play an undernote, in my ears, to that growing murmur of the conflict beyond.

CHAPTER XXIII

"One who has been stung by a snake, shivers at the sight of a string."

—Arabian Adage.

NOW, as an oblong of brightness ahead showed where the passage ended in the light of day, the murmurous sound of the battle waging between the Poonan and the head-hunters smote our ears with ever-increasing volume. It became a rumble, then a discordant loud medley.

We began to differentiate the noises which made up that medley. There was the quick beat of tom-toms, the crash of cymbals, the bellow of war-conches, and the tantara of *cogon* whistles and bamboo flutes, drowning all lesser sounds, shrieking and shrieking to heaven.

We debouched, on a sudden, into the light of day. We determined, thereat, that the medley of noises came from the Avenue of Palms beyond the Stone *Dobo*. The Poonan and the head-hunters were contending in bloody conflict on that broad sweep of avenue before the Stone *Dobo*.

We could not see them. At our back shaped the flowing tail and the hind legs of the half-horse, half-woman of the Stone *Dobo*. The great carved fetlocks, behind the pastern joints over the hoofs of those hind legs, extended out, above our heads, like the tufts of leaning palms.

About us, on three sides, draped the immense leaves of banana trees. We were in a walk of those trees. And very untidy the trees looked, their leaves growing so huge that they dragged and broke into ragged pieces.

Rising above the trees, and the growths beyond, were a great many towering stones. They were the cave-stones, carved into resemblances of animals and extending away in two lines toward the shining black lava walls of the crater. We stood in the growths between those two lines of stones. Some little distance away, the lily-dappled water of the *Danau* flashed blue as pigment in the blaze of the midafternoon sun.

"Ooh, let us go through these growths, between the two lines of stones," advised the girl. "The Avenue of Palms is on this hand, what you say—" and she pointed to her left—"the Avenue of Ebonies on this other hand. We will go through the fields which lie between the rear of the stones that face on the Avenue of Palms, and the stones that face upon the Avenue of Ebonies. It is understood, yes? Then suffer me to lead, for I know the way."

We started off toward the shining black lava walls of the crater. We followed Butterfly of the Dark, now bending under the drooping banana leaves, now making around the sheath-formed trunks of the trees.

Once I looked back toward the white-carved rear of the *Dobo* in fear lest the Monster Man might be following us. But save for a wisp of sunbirds, their plumage gleaming metallically in the sunlight, their slender curved beaks dipping into the honey-cells of banana flowers, no living creature was in sight.

Suddenly, without any warning, the wild medley of sounds, shaking the air, dropped away. There was a momentary lull, a moment of unnatural silence. We could not account for that silence; it had the effect of causing us to stop; we knew naught else to do. We waited, huddling close in a kind of dread.

Came, on a sudden, the prolonged rolling of a single tom-tom; then, on the heels of that, the sound of a great singing.

The girl trembled visibly, as if with affrighted realization of what those sounds betokened. She breathed:

"The Poonan are making a fresh attack. That roll of the tom-tom, the great *nakkara* of the Poonan, is the signal to begin. And as their fathaires, the Tartars, sang hundreds of years ago when they went into battle, so the Poonan are singing, now, as they go into battle."

Fitz shook his head grimly.

"It's the death-song of the Poonan," he said.

Forsooth, it did sound like a death-song; an hysterical treble of singing that seemed yet to swing to a monotonous plaintive under-note.

Sounding above it, all at once, came the din of battle—the clang of steel on steel, the heavy *clack* of locking shields, and the thud of steel striking *kliaus*, of the darts of *sumpitan*s impinging into the wood of *kliaus*. The cries of the wounded swelled into ghastly shrieks, drowning the singing. The earth seemed to rock under the threshing of sandaled struggling feet. The very sky appeared to reflect, in the broad blades of sun, the flash of steely *mandaus*.

The singing of the Poonan was altogether drowned. Well, now, a wild shout, as of triumph, burst from the head-hunters:

"Hoo-hah! Hoo-hah!"

It was taken up again and again. Like peals of thunder, it rumbled and continued to rumble through the crater.

"They've got them!" Fitz exclaimed. "The head-hunters have got them on the run. The Poonan are beaten!"

"We should go," Butterfly of the Dark urged. "We should go on before the head-hunters, searching through the crater for treasure, come upon and slay us."

Her words showed us a grave necessity for going on, an urgent haste. We went on. The way was through a plantation where the coffee-berries hung red and tempting; and then through a grove where different varieties of palm were growing in haphazard juxtaposition — *nipa* palms, sago, date palms, tall slender *nibong*, coconut, *areca catechu*, and *rotan* palms.

We stepped from the grove down into a marshy area where the underground river of the Jallan Batoe came close to the surface to lave the roots of rice-stalks. The girl, stopping not to remove her sandals or roll up her green pantaloons, led the way, pressing doggedly on, despite all distress of sloshing through water and mire.

To be sure, now, we tried to skirt around that rice-paddy and walk upon the firmer ground; but try as we might, we could not keep from slipping, now and anon, into the ooze between the stalks. It was rough going.

"Harry, *mein* friendt, I tells you sum-dings," I heard De Jong say, some distance behind us. "You be goodt *mandoer*, bud

you be bum guide. Poor Koenraad de Jong, he can't see, und yet you don't lead him. You leave him slop about. Und you is falling pehind der barty. Vhy don't you hurry?"

Christmas was indeed falling behind. Burdened as he was with the jewels—in pockets, holster, crook of left arm, and bandanna in right hand—he was not free to concentrate his energies on going on. The jewels weighed him down. Did he slip, the jewels weighed him deep and deeper down into the mire. He had no hand free to help De Jong; whether he slipped or completely overtoppled, De Jong must, perforce, cling to his belt. He could not keep up with us. The need of haste was urgent. Yet, religiously, he held on to those jewels.

I paused. The negro had shown me, there in the passage, that the Green, Green God was not mine to lend or borrow. Yet I thought, now, to argue him into handing it over to the Dutchman, and thereby, in one, relieve him of a hindering burden and pacify the overwrought De Jong.

I turned on the boss-boy.

"Come, Christmas," I said. "We can't have you lagging behind. We're in a hurry. And we can't wait for you. Take my advice. Let De Jong carry it now. You've got enough to do, Harry, to pack that bandanna and the jewels in your holster and pockets."

The negro answered with a dissenting shake of his head, the while, as if fearful of my motives, he switched the god from his left arm to the crook of his right arm. He held the bandanna of jewels in the left hand, near me.

"No bother at all, Mistah Colyum; no bother, Ah 'sure yo'. Jes' keep a-gwine, an' ole Harry'll be taggin' right behind yo'-all."

"Nothing doing, Christmas," I snapped almost blusteringly. "Time's up. You said you'd let De Jong carry it after a little while. Why not now? Come on. Let De Jong carry it."

The negro's eyes glittered, like bits of glass, with selfishness and ill-contained greed. He fawned.

"Jes' a li'l moah, suh; jes' le' me tote it a li'l while moah. Ah'll share it wid yo'-all wunst we git out ob dis heah place. Hones', Ah will."

It was useless. He would not lend the god to De Jong. He would throw not so much as a single burdening jewel away. I

turned, in a depth of disgust and choked anger, and followed on.

Out of the rice paddy it was, and over a rattan fence, into a field planted to castor-oil (*ricinus communis*). Quite boyishly, the girl swung one green-pantalooned leg, and then the other, over the rattan wires spun between *bilian* stakes.

A flight of snowy pigeons that had been attracted to the mottled seeds as bumblebees are attracted to ripe opium poppies, whirled up, at her action, into the air. Above our heads, as we passed beneath, like a cloud they hung, making a continuous rustling noise, darkening the large reddish-green leaves about, and the handsome spikes of flowers.

We came out of the field of man-high castor-oil plants and into a patch dotted with the shrubs and flowers of tea-plants. The sounds of fighting down the avenue, the clatter and crash of battle arms, the triumphing shouts of the head-hunters, were fainting away. Only the flutter of the pigeons, as they resettled behind us like flakes of snow, disturbed, now, the quietude of the afternoon.

On the sudden, from behind us, came again that shrill whirring. I looked back. There, above the tall plants in the castor-oil field, the pigeons floated, once more, in a rustling white cloud. Some movement of man or beast, in that field, had startled them. But neither beast nor man could I see.

Yet a certain uneasiness quickened my mind. I felt something was following us. Some surviving Poonan, some plundering head-hunter, or—and this I feared most of all—the Monster Man!

I had reason thus to fear the Monster Man. It was not alone because we had stumbled upon him in the dark, and wounded him, and thereby aroused, in his brute mind, a malignant anger against us. I feared that he might be trailing us because we had in our possession the Green, Green God.

Always his snaky eyes had noted that that god was zealously kept and religiously guarded within the Stone *Dobo*. He may have missed it from the Stone *Dobo*. Some blind instinct may have been aroused, in his brute mind, to recover that Green, Green God and bring it back to the *Dobo*.

We went on. Ahead showed like the straws of an upended, sawed-off broom, a

close brake of bamboo. Ere plunging through that brake, once again I looked back. Nothing stirred in the languorous afternoon, save the flight of redescending pigeons.

Through the brake, we made. The thin elastic rattan swayed and swished at our movement, with a whispering that to my mind was not nice to hear. We stepped out into a broad tract planted to some kind of tobacco.

I continued to look back. I missed Christmas and the Dutchman from behind us. I heard, almost as I did, the negro calling. He was finding his hands full in holding on to the jewels, dragging the Dutchman along and, at the same time, pressing aside the stalks of bamboo. He burst out, of a sudden, from the brake, still clutching the bandanna in his left hand, the Green, Green God in the crook of his right arm, the Dutchman swinging and clinging to his belt like a shaken bulldog.

On we went through the tall tobacco, the night-blooming flowers of which were closed and scentless in the hot sunlight. I persisted in looking back. Well, suddenly, as if to lend color to my thoughts, I made out that the tops of the bamboo were shaking violently as if some one were pressing through. And a green bird hung above those shaking tops like a bee above a trembling flower.

"Look, Fitz!" I exclaimed, swinging him about with a hand on his arm. "Some one is following us! That whole clump of bamboo is shaking. Some one's coming through it!"

Fitz looked, screwing up his eyes the better to see through the hot glare. After a moment, he said:

"Those bamboo stalks are not shaking, Colum boy. That's the effect caused by the sunlight dancing on the tops of the stalks. Come along."

He started on, as if the subject were concluded and dismissed in one.

"But, Fitz," I objected, "not ten minutes ago, I saw the pigeons whirr up, after we had passed through that castor-oil field, and for no apparent reason. And now look at that bird hanging there, above the clump, as though watching something!"

Fitz laughed, yet I noted that there was, in his laughter, little mirth.

"Oh," he said, "that bird is just some green jungle-hawk, poised above the clump

like a fly over gummed paper, tempted by some smaller prey on the panicked flowers of the bamboo, yet afraid to take a chance. I tell you, Colum boy," he added not unsympathetically, "this business of today has sort of got your nerve. You're daft, plain daft with nervousness. Just get a hold on yourself, Colum lad."

To me, his counsel sounded only like an evasion of the matter in hand. I might be nervous, true; yet I was not to be put off. I turned, as a last resort, to the waiting girl.

"Butterfly of the Dark," I asked almost pleadingly, "is there no way by the pursuing of which we can throw any one trailing us off the track? Is there no way we can go and the one trailing us be afraid to follow? I do fear that some one is trailing us."

She nodded slowly.

"Yes," in a far-away tone, as if her mind was engaged in a struggle between doubt and fear. Then, quickly, as if she had determined upon a course, she said:

"We will go through that forest of poison trees." And she pointed ahead.

Ahead, in the direction she indicated, stretched away a forest of *antiaris toxicaria* trees—a riotous clutter of outlandish gnarled trees, hedged about by wild tangles of undergrowth and dripping from their grotesque arms, long beards of moss and elk-horn ferns.

"No one ever will follow us there," she explained. "From those trees the Poonan obtain the *Ipo-Ipo* poison which they dab on the points of their *sumpitan* darts. No *howeo* that crawls along the ground, no *howeo* that darts through the air and eats the fruit of trees—what you call, flying fox, isn't it?—ever has been seen here. Even the *burongs* do not fly over this forest. If they fly too near the dreadful *Ipo-Ipo* from the trees strikes them and they fall down dead."

I listened with growing wonder.

"Here is where," she pursued, "the Poonan carry out the second article of the *On-dong-ondong*. Criminals condemned to die are offered the chance to live, if they will go to these *Ipo-Ipo* trees and collect some of the poison. Should they be guiltless of crime, they return unharmed. But ooh, no more than twenty ever have returned!"

I made to interpose an objection; but she added hastily, her words tumbling in queer modulation over one another:

"I did not mean to go through this dreadful forest. I am afraid of it. I meant to turn off here into the Avenue of Palms on this hand. We are but a leetle way from the head of the avenue, very near to the tunnel entrance. But if you feel that some one is pursuing us," she ended bravely, her green eyes liquidly alive with commiseration, "I shall lead you through this forest."

I hesitated. My fear that we were being pursued by the Monster Man was great; yet my fear for the safety of our party, and the girl above all, was greater. I looked, in terrible perplexity, at Fitz. He nodded.

"Let's go through it," he said dryly. "That will put to rest all your fears, Colum boy."

His answer settled it. I debated no longer. I gave the word and we started forward toward the forest of poison trees.

And a great wonder was in my mind. Did Fitz fear that the Monster Man was in truth following us? It was contrary to all his previous line of reasoning, of course; yet, unless he feared some graver danger, why should he be willing that we risk, now, the unknown dangers of this poison forest?

CHAPTER XXIV

DE JONG

WITH an unrestrainable agitation, come of fear, we plunged into that forest of poison trees. The sun broke through the interlaced dripping greenery in pools and dancing patterns; but no insects flittered and capered in the patches of light. There was no chatter and scolding of flying foxes, no wispings and cheep of sunbirds. Save for the noise we made in breaking through the entangled underwood, the forest was very quiet, broodingly quiet.

Bravely, in the van, the girl struggled through the growths. I noticed that she covered her mouth and nose with one tiny hand, as if to keep off any poisonous effluvia from the trees. There was a warm, moist, swampy smell in the air. I was nothing loath, therefore, to follow her example.

I heard Christmas whispering covertly to the Dutchman behind him. Ere I could turn my head to make out what it was all about, I noted that Fitz had no hand or protection of any kind over his breathing organs. He was striding boldly ahead of me and almost nonchalantly swinging that

one-stringed fiddle which he still retained in his left hand.

I lifted my free right hand from my holster to pluck his sleeve.

"Cover your mouth and nose!" I warned him in a sort of mumble through my hand.

He chuckled softly.

"Oh, that's all legend," he said in a species of stage whisper so that the girl ahead might not hear. "The Dyaks of British North Borneo have a tale somewhat similar. The fact of the matter is that the inner bark of the young *Ipo-Ipo* tree, when it comes in contact with the skin, produces an irritating itching, while the dry juice is a virulent poison. But this business about some aroma or fluid from the trees striking one dead is all legend. Do you think, if I had not known this forest was harmless, the legend pure tommy-rot, I'd have advised going through here?"

I lowered the hand from my face a deal abashed.

"I thought," I said, "that you had begun to believe in my suspicion. I thought that you feared, with me, that some one was indeed trailing us——"

"And came in here just to throw him off? Nothing of the kind! I just wanted to put a quietus to your fears."

He turned away unceremoniously and followed after the girl.

I felt something, sharp as a beak, pressing into the small of my back. I swung round. It was the emerald beak of the Green, Green God. The negro, immediately behind me, was pressing it into my back to attract my attention. He had no hand over his mouth. His red lips were pursed and as if to enjoin me to secrecy, he sibilated—

"Ssh!"

Then in a low whisper he queried:

"Yo' done said, Mistah Colyum, dat some one was a-followin' us, but yo' didn't say jes' who. Mistah De Young heah, he don't seem to know. Yo' tell me, suh. Jes' who do yo' t'ink, naow, am a-followin' us? De head-hunters?"

I shook my head. Softly I returned—

"The Monster Man!"

He forgot his own injunction, binding secrecy. He ejaculated—

"Gawd A'mighty!"

And his eyes glittered like bits of glass. But they glittered no longer with greed. They glittered with stark terror.

He whipped round on the Dutchman.

"Heah, Mistah De Young," he said, and his voice shook. "Yo' take dis. It—it am de Green, Green God!"

He put just that into the hands of the Dutchman—the Green, Green God.

The act was significant. He feared that the Monster Man was trailing us because he had the Green, Green God. He did not desire to be singled out as the particular object of the ape's malignancy. He passed the god to De Jong. He passed therewith to De Jong, he no doubt hoped, his culpability, his chances of receiving awful retribution from the hands of the Monster Man.



THE bandaged Dutchman fingered the god, the pointed wings, the square tail, the dentated bill—caressingly, gloatingly, as a miser fingers his gold. His teeth clicked audibly with excitement.

"Id is *mein*," he breathed. "Der Green, Green *Gott!* Der vonder of der world! *Mein, mein*, all, all *mein!*"

There came, with startling suddenness, the whirr of wings overhead, and then, on the back of that, now near, now far away, now, a little way off, the rigmarole of William Hyde:

"Went Jallan Batoe. Went round and round and up the Barito to the Jallan Batoe. And then some, then some, bee-lieve me! Saw the red, red rubies in the Robe of Holies. In the Jallan Batoe. Saw the rubies and the diamonds and the pearls and the emeralds in the Jallan Batoe. And the God, the Green, Green God! And then some, bee-lieve me—*cluck, cluck!*"

"Mugol, de parrot! Mugol, de parrot!" ejaculated Christmas, his lean liver-colored face working with superstitious and abject fright.

"Der Vilhelm Hyde!" from De Jong as he clutched, in a passion of fear, the emerald in his hands. "Id's der Vilhelm Hyde, und he vants der *gott!* Der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies!"

Hyde's parrot, Mogul, it was indeed, circling slowly overhead. I could see the shimmer of his green plumage, now and then, where the plash of foliage opened to let in the sunlight. I could hear his sharp clipping tones reeling on and on, without pause, without change, endlessly, like an electric phonograph that would never run down.

"He's wheeling overhead," said Fitz, "like some buzzard floating on slow wings over carrion."

A kind of shiver went through me at Fitz's comparison. It fluttered my brain with a sudden inspirational thought.

"He's following somebody!" I announced. "He's keeping pace in those slow circles to the step of some one walking below him through the growths!"

I became aware, even as I spoke, of a rustling and crackling behind us as if some one were coming on through the under-wood.

"The Monster Man!" I exclaimed, my tongue feeling suddenly dry and thick.

I paused, whirled round and, Iver-Johnson in hand, waited. As one man we all paused and, as if on a common pivot, whirled round to face the intruder. Fitzhamon's .45 Colt gleamed a vicious blue in the filtering sunlight.

I fully expected to see the tremendous hairy bulk of the Monster Man come lumbering through the growths. Imagine my surprise when there stepped out of the growths, no Monster Man at all, but Hyde's old friend, the Gunner!

He was holding a hand over mouth and nose and, as he brushed aside the foliage in coming on, gazing in an unconcealed fear at that foliage, as if in dread of being fatally poisoned at any moment. Now and anon, too, he glanced back over either shoulder, as if some one walked behind him.

The Monster Man it was, I thought right off. But, in the denseness of trees and mosses and underwood behind him, I could make out no long-armed, great, hairy form, no close-set shining eyes in a towering hairless face. There seemed no one behind him. And yet he must have feared there was some one behind him. It must be the head-hunters, I concluded dubiously.

He came up to us. He looked us over with his slant eyes, one after the other. We could only answer his regard with a dumb amazement, our revolvers in hand and ready, but our mouths unable to frame a word.

How long we stood facing one another I have no means of reckoning. I only know that, all the while, Mogul the parrot wheeled slowly overhead and dropped down, from overhead, the words of the rigmarole in shrill, clipped, never-ending singsong. It seemed a long time.

Fitz looked at me, of a sudden, as much as to say, "Oho, this is the Monster Man who you thought was following us!" But the girl it was who first found tongue. She said, in Poonan—

"You have come, *Adjie*, to go with us outside?"

He nodded his bullet head.

"*Ahel*" he returned, his brown face morose. "The cause of the Poonan is lost. There are no more Poonan; the Jallan Batoe is no more. I leave it forever."

His slant eyes, as he spoke, alighted upon the Green, Green God in the hands of the Dutchman. His eyes had been roving from one to the other of us, as I said, and now and anon glancing behind him furtively. At sight of the Green, Green God, however, his slant eyes became fixed, wide, staring.

There was no reason for me to doubt the Gunner. Butterfly of the Dark had told us he had been her father's friend. Yet, as he stared at the Green, Green God, I knew on the sudden, a distrust of him.

"How is it you came through this forest, *Adjie Tumbuk Ladda*?" I asked sharply in Poonan. "Were you not afraid?"

"I had a greater fear, *tuan*," he returned in Poonan readily enough. "They are following me—the *Orang Benua*. I stole out of the *Dobo* by way of the passage behind the rug, just as, flushed with victory, they poured in through the doorway. They must have seen me. I heard them coming on behind me, a number of men, as many as there are bananas on a stalk. I feared these *Ipo-Ipo* trees, but I went through the forest, thinking they never would follow me here."

Perhaps it was because his explanation sounded altogether too glib; perhaps it was because I doubted that the head hunters feared these *Ipo-Ipo* trees of the Poonan; but in either case, I said:

"Yet they do not know the legend. They have no reason to fear this forest."

"I am guiltless of any crime, *tuan*," he answered stoutly in Poonan, his slant eyes suddenly blazing as with a fanatical light. "The head hunters are stained with the blood of the Poonan, their women and their children. The trees know, *tuan*, the trees know!"

It was all according to the religious beliefs that had been inculcated on the Gunner's mind all his life.

"Oh, come," said Fitz, for the first time

showing visible signs of trepidation. "The head hunters are trailing us. Let's hurry and get out of here."

As we started off, the Gunner made to step in between the negro and the last man in our party, De Jong, who carried the Green, Green God. I interposed:

"You walk between Christmas and Fitz, *Adjie*," and I indicated the place. "I'll take care of the Dutchman," I ended, pointing out the bandaged little fellow, as he waited helplessly, the Green, Green God clutched tightly in his two hands.

The Gunner looked at me.

"He can't see, you know," I said in Poonan by way of an explanation that might serve to conceal the distrust that was in my mind.

We started on in the prescribed order. Mogul, the parrot, winged slowly through the air just above De Jong and the Green, Green God. He seemed to have a species of elective affinity for the Green, Green God, probably come of the fact that he believed that god was a real bird of his own kind. Now that he had rediscovered the Green, Green God, I doubted that, old imitator as he was, he would ever again leave us.

Yet never did he forget to shrill his rigmarole. The words clipped out from between his bills in endless flow, much as coins clip out from a die-machine.

With one hand behind me, I held to the left hand of the Dutchman. The Dutchman carried the Green, Green God hugged against his chest by his right hand. I had to look ahead and brush aside, with my free hand, the dragging growths in order to keep them from scratching and tearing the skin of my face.

Well, suddenly, I felt a stiff jerk on the hand holding De Jong's. There was a horrid scream from behind me, quick-ended as if choked off. I whipped about, drawing my Iver-Johnson with my free hand.

De Jong was in the grip of the Monster Man. The ape bulked above the squat form of the Dutchman, a stupendous hairy form, his close-set eyes shining like polished buttons, the shaggy hair over his great chest matted with blood from the wound where Fitz had got him, and the sinewy fingers of his long, heavy-thewed right arm wound about De Jong's neck, clenched tight, terrifically tight, over the throat, squeezing the windpipe, digging through the

flesh, choking De Jong as in the grip of a remorseless pincers.

He had come upon us, up behind us, with noise that we had not heard in the noise of Mogul above us, in the noise of our own making as we went through the growths. What had been the Dutchman's awful sensation, when those long sinewy fingers had closed without warning about his neck, only that horrid choked-off scream could attempt to tell.

As for me, I felt nauseated; the scalp tightened over my head; my digestive organs bunched in my stomach; and I felt as if I would fall. The Iver-Johnson dropped from my limp, shaking right hand. I tried to cry out, but I could not cry out. I stood there, shaking and aging with every click of time, feeling De Jong's hand gripping my left hand tight, tighter, in his travail of agony.

De Jong's mouth was open, stretched. He could not breathe. His wrinkled face was convulsed horribly. He was bluing about the ears from lack of breath.

It was all happening in an indivisible, an unageable fraction of time. I heard Mogul shrilling wildly, right overhead. Then, still gripping De Jong by the throat, the monstrous ape slung him up, like a bundle of rags, under the pit of his great arm.

With a yank that well-nigh threw my arm out from my shoulder, De Jong's grasp broke from mine. The god fell from his other hand into the brush. Without seeming to notice that, the ape swung about on his great padded feet and, De Jong in truth a bundle of rags under his arm, a dead bundle of rags, lumbered back through the growths—the unspeakable thing!

That shattered the vise-grip of horror.

"He's got De Jong! He's got De Jong! He's got De Jong!" I shouted for all the world as the parrot was shrilling overhead.

I swung about. I was just in time to see the Gunner, head down, butt like a goat full into the stomach of the horror-paralyzed negro. The negro gasped, doubled up like a jack-knife, and toppled back against Fitz. The .45 Colt flew out of Fitz's right hand with the impact, and both he and the negro went down in a scramble.

I was upon the back of the Gunner ere he could bring up his head. As he overbalanced and sprawled to the ground be-

neath me, I labored him, with clenched fists, with a ferocious joy. How I longed then for that revolver I had dropped at sight of the ape!

I knew now. He had played us double. He had been Hyde's friend, true; but the religious beliefs that had been inculcated on his mind all his life had proved too strong. The sacred Green, Green God that never had been removed from its *kliau* in the Stone *Dobo*, had been stolen right before his fanatical eyes. He had not come along with us when, in friendliness and pity, I had asked him. He had waited and then sicked after us the Monster Man.

The Monster Man had grabbed De Jong, the last man in our party. Whether the Monster Man had grabbed De Jong because the Dutchman had been the last man in our party or because he knew, in his brute mind, that De Jong had the Green, Green God, I could not determine now. I only knew that, relentlessly, remorselessly, he had choked De Jong. He had killed De Jong. And the Gunner had aided him, had kept us off, had saved the ape from our bullets by knocking the negro into Fitz, the only man then holding a gun in his hand.

"Fitz! Fitz!" I called, as clinging atop the sweaty brown back of the Gunner, I smote him lustily, savagely, about his bullet-head.

The Gunner was squat and heavily muscled as a pugilist. That call to Fitz for aid acted like a spur to him. He broke into a frenzy of struggling. We wrestled. Suddenly he squirmed out from under me and threw all his weight on top of me.

The breath sped from my body with the force of that sudden fall and the heavy weight of his body bearing me down. As it did, he pulled out of my grasp and, like a rebounding ball, actually threw himself up from me and forward upon his feet. In a precipitant wabble, back through the brush he pitched.

Fitz ran up just as I rolled over to feel for my gun. Fitz had retrieved his .45. My Iver-Johnson in hand, I leaped up beside him. We peered through the shaking growths. But the Gunner had disappeared completely, after the Monster Man, into the denseness behind. Save for the continuous shrilling of the parrot overhead, the forest was very still.

"If I only had had my gun!" I muttered

regretfully. "I'd have done for the Gunner, If I only had had my gun."

The negro hobbled up. All at once, he made a dive into the brush.

"De Monster Man—he got De Jong, but not de god!" he shouted. And he picked up, from where in the brush the poor Dutchman had dropped it—the Green, Green God!

I looked at Fitz.

"They'll come back for that, the Green, Green God!" I said.

We turned, and out of the poison forest toward the Avenue of Palms, we raced. Overhead, in faster circles, the parrot Mogul followed and shrilled.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FRIEND AT NEED

ERE we emerged into the Avenue of Palms, we paused momentarily to glance about us. Behind, the underwood vibrated where we had torn through. To one hand, far down the Avenue of Palms, the head hunters chased back and forth from cave to cave-stone, and danced about a great bonfire that licked up in the sweep before the white Stone *Dobo* and shriveled with heat the afternoon air. It was a sacrificial fire of triumph. The head hunters, in jubilation over their triumph, were toasting the heads of the dead Poonan, eating the brains!

To the other hand, the coast seemed clear. There, a stone's throw away, the Avenue of Palms ended in that lava path which led, between embankments of earth, to the tunnel through the crater.

We sped up the avenue and into that lava path between the high walls of earth and of cluttering growths. We rounded the bend. I had feared that the head hunters might have set a guard over the tunnel, but now, as the mouth of that tunnel came in sight, I saw no guard.

We made up the path. And no scamper waved the foliage on the embankments to either hand, no sound of low voices came from those clutters of growths—there was no feeling of the presence of men near at hand at all.

Mogul, the parrot, wheeled overhead, continuously clipping out his rigmarole. His voice seemed to drift farther and farther away. He was following through the air the Green, Green God in the hands of

the negro beneath him. Burdened as that negro was, with every last one of the jewels he had stolen from the *Dobo*, he was falling behind, he could not keep up to us.

"Mistah Fitz! Mistah Colyum! Wait! Wait a moment foh ole Harry Christmas!"

We stopped and waited. The boss-boy came up, then, his naked chest running sweat, his face yellow to the throat with some terrible fear. He held the god in his hands out to me.

"Take it, Mistah Colyum. Ole Harry has done his spell a-packin' it. Naow, yo'—"

"Oh, sure," I agreed, and I reached for the god.

Full well I knew why he feared to pack that god. I myself did not intend long to pack it. I thought to throw the accursed gem away in the dark of the tunnel and thereby fool the Monster Man should he persist in following us, and at the same time rob him of the joy of ever recovering it.

I reached for the god, as I said. Well, at my act, the girl interposed her little form between that god and me. And her little form trembled all over, as with some nervous fear; and an importunate entreaty was in the great green eyes she lifted up to me.

"No, no!" she said. "The Monster Man—he will pursue you, and you alone, if you carry it. Ooh, do not carry it!"

Emboldened by the idea of getting rid, in the dark of the tunnel, of that Green, Green God, I objected:

"But, Butterfly of the Dark, some one must carry it. It seems my turn now."

Fitz had been watching the girl very thoughtfully. Now, he said, his gray eyes a little somber:

"Oh, let it be my turn now, Colum lad. You can relieve me later. For the present, you take care of Butterfly of the Dark."

The girl looked at him as if startled by his offer. She seemed unable to say anything.

Fitz did not wait for her to speak. He turned to the negro and took over the Green, Green God. In his left hand, still dangled that one-stringed fiddle with its attached bow.

"By the by, Colum boy," he said, turning quickly. "You had better take this." And he proffered me that one-stringed fiddle and bow which he never had suffered to leave his hands since Butterfly of the

Dark had given them to him that morning.

I looked at Fitz steadily. There was something about this whole little matter which I could not quite fathom, but which heartily I knew I did not like. The talk, natural enough to all appearances and seemingly inconsequential, appeared yet to ripple underneath with some deep meaning. It was like the frothy spume that conceals the flux and flow of an ocean.

Fitz laughed a little at the troubled concern which no doubt showed in my eyes.

"Come, come; take the fiddle," he said, "and run along with the girl." His gray eyes sparkled with a bit of their old abandon.

I fell in with the idea of his words. I took fiddle and bow, took Butterfly of the Dark by one tiny clinging hand; and I led the way, at a quickening run, into the dark of the tunnel.

But not for long did I lead the way. Past Butterfly of the Dark and me, as we ran along, of a sudden sped the negro. Fear lent wings to his feet. He desired to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the Monster Man. Should the Monster Man still be tenaciously following us, it would act to his advantage also that the rest of the party be behind him. He certainly valued his liver-hued hide.

I looked back once to see for a surety whether the Monster Man and his treacherous familiar, the Gunner, were following us. Against the disk of light which was the tunnel mouth by which we had entered, no one showed, save Fitz.

Fitz followed stoutly, not three jumps behind us. Above his head the parrot fluttered. We could not see the parrot in the dark of the tunnel; but we knew he was in a pretty predicament. Come of the dark which made it difficult for him to find his way and utterly impossible to see the Green, Green God in the hands of Fitz, Mogul had left off shrilling the rigmarole. We could hear him beating his wings against the ceiling of the tunnel and brushing, now one wall, now the other, like a blind bat.

Fearfully small with distance showed ahead the disk of light that was the other entrance of the tunnel, the jungle entrance. The tall, bow-legged, racing form of the negro before us filled it, almost obscured it from sight.

We ran on to the somber accompaniment of our footfalls ringing on the rock pavement and the flutter of flurried wings overhead. The far-off disk of light slowly expanded. We came to where the underground river of the Jallan Batoe spouted up to the surface. As near as I could judge, we were then half-way through the tunnel.

I looked back. Against the revealing light of the tunnel entrance behind, nothing stood forth in silhouette, neither monstrous ape nor squat, muscled man. The Gunner and the Monster Man were nowhere in sight. They had not entered the tunnel. Perhaps, I thought with an ardent hope, they no longer were following us.

Yet we did not pause. Butterfly of the Dark bothered not to remove her sandals and roll up her pantaloons. We went on. We splashed through the water of the shallow stream. After a little, ten feet or so behind the negro, we came out of the tunnel, out into the sun-filtering jungle.



WE huddled together for a moment's respite and a gathering of our frightened faculties. Looking back for the third time, then, I saw, stealing in black silhouette through the light of the other entrance the squat form of the Gunner and, towering behind him, seeming to crowd that entrance, the stupendous shape of the Monster Man.

I knew then. They had waited to one side of the entrance, watching to see us, the four of us, come out of that tunnel. They had feared some ambuscade, there in the dark of the tunnel. Now were they coming on.

The sight was fearsome; yet now that we were out of the Jallan Batoe, out in the sun-filtering jungle, I got an access of courage. I tore, as it were, a leaf from their book. Taking Butterfly of the Dark once more by the hand, I guided our party to one side of the tunnel entrance. Here a shoulder of earth hid us completely from the sight of the oncoming Gunner and Monster Man.

The parrot followed overhead and, ere I could speak, set up once again his shrill clipping rigmarole.

"Dat parrot!" exclaimed the negro, his lips twitching with fear. "He'll gib us away, he'll gib us away to de Monster Man!"

I whistled at the bird.

"Shut up, you infernal devil!" I shouted.

The parrot kept right on.

"Cluck, cluck!" said the girl, of a sudden making that indescribable noise of tongue striking palate which had been a characteristic of her father.

As at a signal, the parrot ceased. Noiselessly, on slow wings, he circled above our heads, his red eyes cocked on the Green, Green God in the hands of Fitzhamon.

"What's afoot, Colum lad?" asked Fitz. "Thinking of ambushing, here, the Gunner and the Monster Man?"

It was my idea. I nodded.

"Exactly. But you don't need to stay. It's a chance and I'm willing to risk it. Go ahead; keep to the side, out of sight, along the bank—you and Harry and Butterfly of the Dark. This is my play or my grave, it all depends. I'll cover the rear. I'll stand here, to one side of the tunnel, and pick them off as they come out. Give me your .45, Fitz," I ended, proffering him my small-calibered Iver-Johnson. "I'll get the Gunner, anyhow."

All at once, as I ended, the girl was before me, grasping my two hands as if to stay me.

"But the Monster Man!" she cried in a rush of words. "The Monster Man will get you! He will kill you! Oh, do not stay behind!" And her green eyes filled with a passion of pleading. "For the love of that God about whom my fathaire taught me, do not, do not stay behind!"

I looked at her in a kind of shocked amazement. And yet it seemed to me that there was, in that amazement, a certain wonderful thrill. I looked and continued to look into her pleading liquid green eyes and I knew, quite of a sudden, that now I never could stay behind.

How it was, I can not tell; but abruptly I became aware that Fitz was eying us, looking from the girl to me and back again—weighing and watching us with nothing of amazement in his gray eyes, with only a vast seriousness, a somber seriousness. Quite as his eyes had gone a little somber during that talk at the other entrance of the tunnel, so now his gray eyes went wholly somber. I began to understand what had been beneath that seemingly inconsequential talk.

Said Fitz, breaking the spell:

"You go on, Colum boy, and take care of Butterfly of the Dark. I'll stay behind."

"But I do not want—ooh, I do not want that any one should stay behind!" exclaimed the girl, her lip quivering. "I am afraid, afraid of the Monster Man!"

"Some one must stay behind; it is a good chance," said Fitz, shaking his head morosely. "It may as well be me."

The situation that I had started had got out of my hands. I could say nothing.

The girl looked about her in a terrible perplexity. Her eyes alighted on the negro. She gave a little exclamation.

"Ooh, how about him?" she asked.

Fitz looked at the negro and came as near to laughing as it was possible under the circumstances.

"Yes; how about you, Christmas?" he asked in turn.

"Oh, lawdy, boss!" ejaculated the negro, his eyes very white, his bow-legs quaking. Then, recovering his glib tongue, he added—

"Ah hain't got no gun."

"Easily remedied, Harry," said Fitz, apparently toying with the negro. "Here's mine." And he offered him his .45 Colt.

The negro backed away from the proffered revolver.

"Aw, let's go on, Mistah Fitz," he expostulated. "Mebbe we'll all git away togedder. Ah hates to kill a man. Let's go on."

"You don't have to kill a man," Fitz persisted. "Kill only the ape. We'll attend to the Gunner later."

"Let's go on, Fitz," I interposed. "We'll forget my scheme. Maybe, as Harry says, we will all be able to get away safe. You don't have to stay behind——"

Fitz shook his head.

"My mind's made up. I'm going to stay behind," he insisted.

The girl was watching me, her long green eyes pleading into mine, begging me to dissuade Fitz from his determination. I could think of but one thing to do. I drew Fitz to one side, nearer the tunnel entrance.

I leaned over and chanced a look into that tunnel. Some way down the tunnel bulked blackly the tall and squat forms of the Monster Man and the Gunner. They were no longer moving, no longer coming on. They were standing still, close together, as if fearful lest we should be awaiting them at the mouth of the tunnel. They were plainly outlined in silhouette.

"Fitz!" I exclaimed with sudden inspiration. "They're standing as still as targets in a shooting gallery. You're a

better shot than I am. Shoot, man, shoot!"

Fitz leaned over, took one look, and brought up his extended right arm. There was the flash of steel in the sunlight. They must have seen that flash. As Fitz shot, the two silhouettes down the tunnel broke and disappeared. It was as if the darkness had swallowed them. They had pressed back against the walls, out of the limning light of the opposite entrance. Only the echoes of the crack of the revolver came back to us. Fitz swore.

"I missed them," he said; "but, anyhow, that will serve to hold them for a little while. Now what's on your mind, Colum boy? Quick; out with it."

I came back to the reason why I had drawn Fitz aside.

"There is only one thing on my mind, Fitz," I said. "That is, to have you come along with us."

Right off, he became evasive.

"But isn't this the logical place for an ambush that will stop the pursuit?" he asked. "Didn't you think of it yourself?"

"I know," I admitted, "but why be so persistent, why——"

"I'll tell you, Colum lad," he said of a sudden with great seriousness. "We can't all of us get out of this alive. I know that I'm going to do my best, now, to see that you and the girl do get out of this alive."

He grabbed me by both shoulders and looked steadily at me with his gray eyes.

"Colum boy," he said, "you've been my buddie for six long years. You've stood by me when I had remittances to burn in wild jamborees, and when I hadn't a cent and was a down-pin for fair. Here's my big chance to do something worth while for you. And I should do something worth while for you; for I tell you, Colum boy, life is just beginning, now, for you and for Butterfly of the Dark."

"I know what you mean, Fitz, old man," I said. "But there's no need of your sacrificing yourself. Didn't Butterfly of the Dark say that she wanted none of us to stay behind?"

"Oh, don't be a ninny," he returned with spirit, with something of his old self. "She said that as any tender-hearted girl might say that; but when she pleaded with you, Colum, she pleaded as only the one girl in all the world can plead. Don't be a ninny, Colum lad. Life's just beginning for you. I—I have nothing to live for.

Since that affair at Fort Alfred when I tried to sell some British rifles to the Sultan of Brunei, I've been a down-pin, 'cashiered' from the Army, cast off by my father. It's no use me tagging along any longer. I tell you, I welcome this chance to do something for you. All I ask is that, should I get mine now, you will let my father know."

He whispered, thereupon, a name in my ear, the titled name of his father. We shook hands very soberly. I gave another look into the tunnel, but I could see no one; the Gunner and his hideous ape were still pressed in fear against the wall, and no doubt waiting. Then, as if nothing unusual was toward, we returned to the girl and the negro.

The girl's eyes lighted up gloriously.

"Ooh!" she exclaimed. "Now we shall all go on together."

But Fitz shook his head.

"I stay behind," he said simply. "I bid you good-by."

He held out his hand to her. She took it gravely, sadly. As he bowed low over her hand, the tears sprang to her eyes. Suddenly, as his head came up, she leaped forward and, with the simplicity and unconcealed emotion of a child, kissed him.

Color flooded Fitzhamon's face, the sparkle came back into his gray eyes, and manlike, in an effort to hide his feelings, he fell into a perfect fever of action. He turned about and made for the tunnel entrance.

"Keep to the bank, out of sight!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to take a chance shot at that Monster Man along the wall. Go along."

Christmas bent down and picked up from where Fitz had left it, the Green, Green God. I took Butterfly of the Dark by the hand, the one-stringed fiddle in the other, and then, followed by the negro bearing the Green, Green God, reluctantly we left Fitz and made hurriedly down the stream along the bank. Over our heads the parrot floated.

CHAPTER XXVI

TO KILL A MAN

FITZ took one look into the tunnel. He slapped back against the shoulder of earth. It was as if he were impaled

against that shoulder of earth. His .45 Colt gleamed a dull malignant blue in his extended right hand. With the other hand, frantically, he motioned us to hurry on.

I understood. The Gunner could hold back the Monster Man no longer. Monster Man and Gunner were coming out of the tunnel.

Keeping out of the range of vision of those in the tunnel, slipping into the stream, leaping from spot to patch of firm ground, ducking beneath the dangling lianas, dodging around the huge boles of trees, along the bank we raced. Yet every so often, despite the difficulty of keeping one's feet, I persisted in looking back.

Suddenly I halted.

Slinking along the tunnel wall nearest Fitz, glancing this way and that, of a sudden the Gunner stole out of the tunnel. He saw Fitz pressed back against the shoulder of earth, not six feet away. His slant eyes spread, his brown face went the color of clay. He made to leap back.

Fitz got him. He plugged the Gunner through the head between those spread slant eyes. In a slow half circle, the Gunner reeled round on his heels. The sharp report of the .45 came to us. The Gunner pulled up on his toes, stiffened and pitched back upon his head—dead.

A fraction of time, seemingly long as eternity, followed. We waited. We waited as through a year of days, in which every day was long as an equinoctial day. Then, out of the tunnel mouth, lumbered the Monster Man.

Butterfly of the Dark uttered a faint gasping sound at the sight, and her hand tightened convulsively on mine. I saw Fitz's pistol arm jerk. He had fired. Ere the ape knew he was there, he had fired.

The ape wheeled round slowly, clumsily. His teeth clenched together. Afar off as we were, I seemed to hear them crunch and grind with rasping sound.

"Shoot, Fitz, shoot again!" I shouted. And I dropped the fiddle to pull my own gun.

Fitz shot. As the ape faced him—a monstrous brute with glittering snaky eyes and grinding teeth that showed with pain—he shot for the second time. He got the ape in the deep, vatlike chest, where the long black strands of hair were already matted with dried blood.

The ape's crunching teeth pulled open.

He emitted one scream, a scream like the scream of a man in pain. There is nothing so horrible as the scream of a man in pain. I shivered. The parrot over our heads started up his shrill rigmarole.

The Monster Man was not six feet from Fitz. He moved no nearer. He reached out one heavy-thewed, hairy, six-foot-long arm. Fitz shot a third time, plugging him in the flat wide-nostriled nose. That nose mashed flat against his concave face. Then the long fingers of the ape's arm, working and gripping like some enormous pincers, got Fitz by the throat. Fitz made no sound. Only the .45 fell from his hand.

A cry welled up through my sanded throat.

"Fitz! For God's sake, Fitz!" And my gun leveled, I pulled the trigger.

I was chancing the possibility of hitting Fitz as well as that unspeakable ape. There was no report. I pulled and pulled again, with distracted hurry, my hand corded and sweating. The safety clicked fast as the parrot clipped overhead; but the trigger would not release, would not come back. There was no revolve of the chambers, no snap of firing-pin, no spit of death-dealing lead.

The trigger was stuck with rust. Despite the fact that I had, in a fashion, cleaned the gun, after that immersion in the Barito, the works had rusted because of lack of oil. Often during that day and the days prior, had I made to put the gun to test; but never had I pulled the trigger. Now, at this terrible time of test, it failed me utterly. It was useless. Yet, like a man clinging to a forlorn hope, spasmodically I continued to pull on the trigger.

The sinewy fingers of the Monster Man held Fitz, at arm's length, by the throat. The eyes of Fitz were stark and staring, his face swelling and purpling before my very gaze. I saw the ape lift his other hand and lay the palm of it, that was hairless like a man's, flat upon Fitz's forehead, brushing off his hat. The ape put a pressure on that hand, slight for him, yet terrific in power. Fitz's head went back.

Understand. The fingers of the ape's hand were so preposterously, so incredibly long they reached round behind the cervical at the back of Fitz's neck, the ends clasping over one another. The other hand pressed Fitz's head back. The neck was between a monstrous leverage. The neck must give.

Fitz doubled up with agony. His legs folded up to the pit of his stomach. The ape held him out, off the ground. He pulled toward him on the hand that was clasped about Fitz's neck. He pressed away on the hand that was on Fitz's forehead. His eyes burned like little rubies.

With some vile and uncanny instinct, he knew what he was about. He was breaking Fitz's neck, snapping his spine, the source of life.

There was no sound, save the sound of the clicking safety on my revolver, the incessant clipping of the parrot above. Fitz's head went back, back. . . . It was abominable!

My clicking revolver was thrust aside. The girl was clinging to me. She was quivering pitifully in an anguish of horror.

"He's broken his neck, he's broken his neck—the hideous monster!" she wailed. "Ooh, take me away, take me away!"

I dropped the useless revolver. Up into my arms I swept her and down the brook, through bitter darkness, I raced.

Yet I could hear Mogul calling and calling overhead, like an electric phonograph that would never run down. And I knew the negro was at my heels. He was carrying that accursed thing, the cause of all our wo—the Green, Green God.

CHAPTER XXVII

WE SLIP DOWN THE RIVER

I WAS like a man in a nightmare, seeing but without sense. I ran on without conscious effort, without feeling of any kind. How long later it was when I came back to myself, I can not tell. Nor can I say exactly what it was which brought me to a knowledge of myself.

It may have been all or one of three things. It may have been the sudden stopping of the rigmarole upon the part of Mogul overhead, as if he had grown tired. It may have been that hideous moaning which swelled up behind us, all at once, and drifted to my ears. Or it may have been none of these things at all, but only the arousing of Butterfly of the Dark in my arms.

She awoke from her faint of revulsion and horror with such a start that she snapped out of my arms. I made to pick her up, but once on her feet, she cried:

"Let me run, let me run, too! He's coming on behind us—the Monster Man!"

Surely enough, the Monster Man was dogging our steps. I could hear him moaning over his wounds, as he came on—a moaning that was worse even than terrible, that was inarticulate, that was nothing human—that was like the keening of a starved animal, like the wailing of a lost soul.

"This way!" I commanded.

And, taking the girl by the hand, closely followed by the negro, I turned off from the brook and made through an opening in the jungle into a runway deep as a gully.

We sped along that runway. Over our heads, above the plash of trees, the parrot followed in an unnatural silence. And ever followed, too, the sound of that hideous moaning. The Monster Man was lurching on after us. There was no cautious Gunner to hold him back. Not all his wounds, now five in number, could hold him back. He was dogging us with that brute tenacity of purpose which causes a wolf to assail and yet again assail a strong moose, which causes a bulldog with his dying convulsion to lock his teeth in the neck of his victim.

We debouched, of a sudden, into that little sloping clearing on the side of the Jallan Batoe where the party had camped that morning in going in. Now, of the five that had composed that party, only we three were left.

As we ran, hand in hand, down the slope of that clearing, I heard above the moaning of the ape the sound of Christmas calling me.

"Wait, Mistah Colyum; wait a spell foh pore ole Harry!"

The negro had not yet appeared out of the jungle. So fast had we been running that, burdened as he was by the many jewels in his pockets, in his holster, in the bandanna in his left hand, and the Green, Green God in the crook of his right arm, he could not keep up with us.

Quickly, as we waited, the parrot floated out from the jungle in a great silence. Beneath him, from the growths, appeared Christmas. With the exertion he had been put to, his face was glossy with sweat, his bare chest like some oiled silk, his nostrils breathing in and out and showing red as twin fires.

I noticed, with a shock, that he carried

in his left hand, along with the knotted bandanna of jewels, that one-stringed fiddle and attached bow. He seemed crazed with the desire to keep everything which we had brought out of the Jallan Batoe, even that one-stringed fiddle. That was a distinct shock. To see in his hands that fiddle which Hyde had made, which the girl owned, and which poor Fitz had carried for so long like some precious treasure—there was that about the sight which seemed to savor of desecration, of sacrilege.

"You thief!" I invected in a white flux of scorn and abomination. "Why didn't you leave it behind? Why didn't you leave it behind to mark the spot where poor Fitz died?"

I reached out, as he came up to us, and snapped the fiddle from his hand. He did not answer me. As if my action was the instance for further offerings, he proffered to me the Green, Green God.

"Heah," he said between quick breaths. "Yo' take it, Mistah Colyum."

I looked at him, utterly amazed for a moment, the next moment outrageously angry. It was an effort to keep from swearing in the presence of the girl.

"I don't want it!" I exploded. "I have enough to do to try to get out of this alive. It's only a burden. Throw it away. The Monster Man will find it and turn back. The plagued thing, it's the whole cause of his chase of us."

The negro showed visible signs of a recrudescence of terror. His lips went yellow, dry and wrinkled, like lips of clay.

"Do yo' t'ink so?" he asked huskily. "Do yo' really t'ink he's chasin' us foh de Green, Green God?"

I could not help it, but swore then, outright.

"You hypocrite! You've known that all along. Throw the — thing away!"

My voice was a command. Harry Christmas looked hard at me. He realized, as he looked, that I had seen through his duplicity, his feigned innocence of the cause of the pursuit. His tongue ran out, red and catlike, and wetted his parched lips. Then, hastily, without a word, he made to throw the accursed god away.

But a hand on his arm stopped him. It was the hand of Butterfly of the Dark. Her face was white as a death-mask; the eyes she lifted up to him, like two frozen green pools.

"Give it to me," she said with quiet determination. "I will carry it."

I looked at her, astounded, the tongue glued in my head. Well, as I looked at her, and she so young and frail, astoundment fled me; I went cold all over. I felt dismayed at the idea of her carrying the accursed emerald. I felt appalled with a dread of the consequences which I thought inevitably would ensue from following such a course. My tongue loosened.

"No, no!" I cried, and I made to lift the plagued emerald from her hands.

Her eyes stopped me. Her eyes seemed frozen, now, as with some fixed purpose. My hands fell to my side.

She noted my evident and sincere distress. Quickly, then, with commiseration, her eyes softened into liquid pools.

"Do not fear, Colum," she breathed, for the very first time calling me by name. "I have a reason. Should you throw this god away now, the Monster Man would never know. He is only a brute, though—though a hideous one. He has only a brute's mind. He would never, never find the jewel. He would follow us on and on. And I—I have a better way. Suffer me to carry it. Ooh, trust in me!" She pleaded with her green pools of eyes.

I could not nod quickly enough. I felt thrilled by the precious intimacy which had sprung up between us and which seemed subtly to have been strengthened by her utterance of my name.

"Let us go on, Butterfly of the Dark," I said. "It is high time."

And indeed it was high time that we should be going on. The parrot above our heads was fluttering agitatedly, as if with some instinctive foreboding that something was about to happen. The moaning behind us was growing louder, and I could even hear the crackling of the growths, now and then, as the monster ape broke through. He was quickly overhauling us.

We clambered down the great timbers of the ruined fort which bulked up on the slope of the clearing like talus at the foot of a cliff. We cleared out of the clearing and into the sun-filtering jungle.

With the girl carrying the Green, Green God, and I the one-stringed fiddle, and the negro trailing close behind, we leaped over fallen tree-trunks which lay athwart the paths, we scurried beneath lianas which hung perilously low, we broke through tan-

gles of *cogon* grass, surged through wet welters of fern—sped on and on, down that jungle, that Adam-old jungle, through lush and creepers and all manner of green, rich green vegetation.

Running thus, at the top of our speed, we made a deal of noise. But the jungle was vibrant, behind us, with louder noises. It crackled and snapped with the rending of growths, as the Monster Man wobbled at increased pace after us; it wailed continuously with that horrid moaning which never lessened, never ceased. All the while, above our heads, the parrot floated in abnormal silence on scarce-moving wings.

After a little, we emerged upon the side of that leafy dingle where, that morning, we had seen Christmas playing his solitary game of craps. The injustice of all that had befallen struck me forcibly at this reminder of the negro's treachery. Christmas himself gave no sign of recognition, however, as, closely following us, he hugged the side of the dingle.

After a little more, we came to where the ground sloped below us in easy descents and the trees filed away in long arcades, like the ranks of natural columns in a pine forest. We burst out on hillside savannas where the late afternoon sun gilded the decaying leaf-mold on the ground. We scurried across innumerable greeny glades, any one of which might have been the little opening in the jungle where first I had seen Butterfly of the Dark.

We were treading familiar ground. Well, through the trees, all at once, came the flash of sunlight on water. My heart lightened as if a weight had been lifted from it. Here was the Locang.

The next moment my heart sank like a chunk of lead. The night prior, for the first time in my life, I had seen a monkey swim. Now a horrible fear was mine that the great ape could swim. If only we could find *Lip-Plak-Tengga's gobang*, where she had left it the night before, and get into it, out on the river, away from the long arms of the monster!

We raced on. Behind us the moaning of the ape ceased abruptly. Arose, then, the loud rending and crackling of growths. The Monster Man was concentrating his energies. Despite all his wounds, with a strength preter-human, a tenacity of purpose terrible and remorseless, he was

shoving his pace. He was close behind and coming faster.

We came out into the silt beneath the arched, branching, stilt-like mangroves which bordered the river, like great curved arms elbow-deep in the water, like running hoops. Quickly I looked across the scummy surface of the slow-moving stream. There, fifty feet away on the opposite shore, lay that natural theater where the head hunters had held forth, the night prior, and *Lip-Plak-Tengga* had appeared. I knew thereat that *Lip-Plak-Tengga's gobang* was near at hand, beneath the running hoops of mangroves.

Sloshing through mire and water, I searched for that *gobang*. I searched hastily, feverishly. The sounds made by the Monster Man in tearing through the growths were growing louder, monstrous with nearness. He was very near.

I found the *gobang*. As I drew it from beneath the running hoops and called to the girl to wade out, into the canoe, almost capsizing it, leaped Harry Christmas.

"De Monster Man! He's comin' up!" he shouted. And he crept forward into the bow of the boat to put as much distance as possible between himself and that oncoming ape. He sat with the knotted bandanna of jewels in his lap, his teeth chattering in his head.

I lifted the girl in my arms and put her into the boat. She held the Green, Green God, almost concealed, against her purple blouse. I cast in after her the one-stringed fiddle and bow, and leaped into the stern. I picked up a short paddle from the stern thwart.

A muffled gasp, as of terror unutterable, came from the girl. The paddle fell from my hand. I sat and stared.

Crawling along one of the great hoops, right above our heads, was the Monster Man. He was streaming blood from the wounds in chest and arm and nose, kept open by the exertions of his pursuit; from the wounds in his shaggy hide where the spiny growths, in ruthlessly breaking through, had scratched and torn him. He was hideous with blood.

He reached down one six-foot-long arm. Perhaps it was because he could not see that Green, Green God concealed by the arms of the girl; perhaps it was because his blood-spattered eyes mistook that knotted bandanna, in the lap of the negro, for the

Green, Green God; but anyway, with his great sinewy hands, he got Harry Christmas by the neck. He derrickd him into the air. With his great sinewy hands he whirled Christmas by the neck around in the air. The negro's army hat dropped into the water and floated down-stream.

Christmas uttered no cry. His lean Afro-Arabian face was convulsed, gutted of blood; his reddish-brown skin an indescribable pasty gray. His eyes seemed all whites; they protruded like a frog's. His tongue lolled out.

The knotted bandanna of jewels fell from his clutching hand and splashed into the water. His bare feet tore off leaves and branches as he whirled round. As he continued to whirl round and round, out of his pockets streamed the jewels, some plugging into the river, others thudding into the boat. One just missed my head. It was the green-jade idol with the pearly eyes, the snake of strung emeralds in its one hand, and the ball of ruby in the other. It fell into the boat.

A sharp snap like the snap of a breaking twig, and the negro's neck broke. I saw Christmas spin from the hands of the ape, go somersaulting in a great parabola through the air, and then plunge, with an enormous *slap* down into the river.

He went down head first. He never came up. Either the jewels, remaining on his person, weighed him down, or his writhing hands got snagged in the brackish growths which barnacled the bed. His right foot, looking almost white in the instep, kicked above the water for a horrid moment like the severed tail of a lizard, then disappeared as if it had been contracted by some last convulsion.

We were immediately beneath the ape. The girl stood up. All color was sucked from her face; her hair looked very red against that chalk pallor of her face; but her nostrils were tense with determination, with superlative bravery. She looked up at the abomination above her with eyes frozen from horror.

And then up to him, into his six-foot-long arms, his sinewy hands, his soft-looking palms that were bare of hair like a man's, she passed the Green, Green God.

With something like a sob of joy, the wounded brute clutched the Green, Green God to his chest. Hugging the god as he would his young, about he turned and back

along the hoops of mangroves he crawled. The watching parrot actually jumped on his wings in the air.

"Went Jallan Batoe. Went round and round and up the Barito to the Jallan Batoe," he called, of a sudden.

And shrilly clipping out the rigmarole, without pause, without change, endlessly, like an electric phonograph that would never run down, he wheeled round in the sky; and keeping close tab with his red eyes on the ape lumbering and sobbing below him, back he, too, headed into the Jallan Batoe.

The girl crept to me over the thwarts. She clung to me in an anguish of body and mind, her delicate lips very rigid, her long greenish eyes chill and dry. I lowered my head and kissed her once upon the lips. A trembling quivered her lips, and a mercy of tears bathed her eyes. She nestled close, weeping softly. And we slipped down the river.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON BOARD THE K. P. M. STERN-WHEELER
Duymaer van Noort

I SAT mute under grim memories, motionless in a waking dream. How long later it was, I know not; but of a sudden, with a start, I awoke to a consciousness of my surroundings.

The current was pulling us along at a neat clip. The banking walls of lush were opening out to either hand, moving back like scenery being shifted into the wings of a stage. We were making a long swerve into a great flood of river. We were rounding into the Barito.

The spell of heat, which had held throughout the day, had lessened by now perceptibly. Overhead, the sinking sun was streaking the sky with fading rosy shafts and, in that sunset, the air had become quite cool.

I looked at my water-tight watch. It was six o'clock. Hardly could I credit that all our ordeals, in the Jallan Batoe and out, had taken place in the short space since noon—an interval of but six hours.

I picked up the paddle I had dropped at sight of the hideous ape. There was in the action something of the feeling of the first action one makes on arising, something of the tingle of the first dash of cold water on the face. I tingled with the realization that I was for a fact alive.

After all that had happened, of all those who had gone with us into the Jallan Batoe, only remained alive Butterfly of the Dark and I. In exaltation over the mere fact of living, with a will that was like an expression of thanksgiving, I fell to paddling.

Butterfly of the Dark was at my feet in the bottom of the boat, her red and rakishly capped head pillowed in my lap. At my action, she opened her long greenish eyes. She smiled up at me.

A prolonged thrumming sound shook through the air. She sat up.

"Ooh, that is the sunset singing of the stones in the Jallan Batoe," she lisped, as I gave ear. "All day the great stones have been receiving the heat of the sun. Now, in the cool of sunset, they are losing their heat with noises that hum through the air. It will only last for a leetle."

Surely enough, very quickly it drifted away. The darkling cloak of eventide was falling about us. Almost in a jiffy, it seemed, we were floating through a sable blackness.

The current was speeding us along. Well, now, come of the aid of my paddling, we were making as fair a pace as the fourteen Lon Wai rowers had made in bucking that current, coming up.

After a little, a full moon stepped out in the vast black void above. It cast a fantastic sheen over things. It was bloated and red, as if with the blood of all those who had died that day.

I noticed, in that fantastic sheen of moonlight, something which I had not noticed before. Butterfly of the Dark was bending down and up and leaning over the side, for all the world as if she were bailing water from the bottom of the boat. She must have been doing this for some time, unperceived by me in the early darkness. Now, for a long moment, I watched her ere I understood.

In a heap, then, it struck me. She was casting overside those jewels which, as he had spun in the air, had streamed out of the pockets of Harry Christmas.

I dropped the paddle to catch her hand. In the hand I caught, there gleamed that green-jade idol with the pearly eyes, the snake of strung emeralds in its one hand and, in its other, the ball of ruby.

"Do not throw it away," I said almost bluntly in my haste. "Throw none of them away. Leave them in the bottom of

the boat. We shall need every last jewel when we get out in the world."

"Ooh, but I loathe them," she said, with a little shiver. "They are the cause of all our troubles of this day—they and the Green, Green God. Now, no matter where we shall go, they always will be a cause of trouble. This is the only one remaining. Please, please, Colum, let me throw it away!"

There was grave reason in her plea; yet, with decision, I shook my head.

"You do not know, Butterfly of the Dark. We shall need money on which to live, out in the world, and this idol will prove as good as money."

I told her, thereupon, something of that world toward which we were drifting. She agreed, in the end, to suffer me to retain the green-jade idol which had fallen from the holster of the negro. The rest of the jewels she already had tossed overside, while the night was dark.

This talking of the world outside had brought me, with a kind of jar, to a realization of the true posture of affairs. There we were, a girl and a man, floating alone, in a small Dyak canoe, down the Barito. She was little more than seventeen. Once out in the world, she would have to travel under the dubious chaperonage of a man not yet turned twenty-six. As delicately as it is given a man to explain such things, I explained to her how it was that the world might come to look askance at such a situation.

Her greenish eyes widened in the moonlight.

"But we are married!" she burst out in unrestrainable surprise. "We were married with a keess, that time the parrot and ape turned back and we drifted down the Loeang."

I started involuntarily, somewhat shocked, but more thrilled and awed. It was according to the quaint Poonan marriage ceremony. I had married Butterfly of the Dark with the tremulous sacrament of a kiss.

A fear appulsed on my brain. Had she not kissed Fitz?

"Ooh, no!" she returned to the question. "I keessed poor Fitz, yes, upon the forehead. But he did not keess me. There is a difference."

I remembered thereat. Hyde had told me that the Poonan custom held that one

should kiss and be kissed by the one he loved and who loved him. There *was* a difference! Carried out of myself with immeasurable joy, once again as we slipped down the river, I kissed her whom I loved.

Her greenish eyes went very long. Like the eternal woman, the red-haired, unspoiled little tomtit she was, she said defiantly—

"Now we do not care what the world may say!"

I nodded, laughing. In my own mind, however, knowing that world as she did not, I resolved to seal indissolubly, at the first happy opportunity, the bond that now existed between us.

Through the night, we paddled. I say we, advisedly; for despite all my opposition, Butterfly of the Dark would do her share of the paddling. When, after she had paddled a spell, I coaxed her to desist and try to sleep, she only pouted and knuckled her forehead with adorable little frowns.

"It will keep me warm," she argued with some reason.

Gray films of mist were floating along the water when, at dawn, we pulled up on one side of the river and, debarking, breakfasted on *rawa-rawa*, *cho*, *durian* oranges, and other jungle fruits which we gathered from the trees and bushes.

Later that day, as Butterfly of the Dark was snatching a little sleep, the river narrowed and darkened into a sort of murky tunnel where great trees stood up, like natural columns, in midstream and formed overhead a thick arcade of growths. At the sudden blotting out of the sunlight, she awoke with a start.

I explained to her that this was a new channel into which the Barito recently had perverted itself.

"Not a hundred yards below here," I said with sudden memory, "I was thrown off our *prau*, in coming up, when Christmas dropped his steering sweep after kicking Fitz."

Shortly after noon, according to the sun above and the watch in my pocket, we passed that point where the jungle broke on one hand and opened into the Green Swamp. Here, dead and leafless trees shoved up through steaming ooze, and there was no undergrowth, save vast stretches of moss. As I looked at that crude, achingly green moss, I was poignantly reminded of the endless litany of De Jong:

"Always der mossy-green und der miles deep mit color like der still jungle. Orchits withers; jungles dies; bud emeralds don't dies. Dey glow der green as der moss—green und green."

The poor Dutchman!

The lush to either hand reeled by in never-ending, never-changing procession. Suddenly, a piece below the Green Swamp, a clearing broke out on one side the river. In that clearing bulked up a huddle of buildings — sleeping - sheds, kitchens, and drying-houses for orchids. About them all, keeping off the encroaching jungle and its denizens, circled a rough palisade of bam-boo.

It was that *campong* where the Dutchman, Fitz, the negro boss-boy, the Lon Wai bearers and myself had camped, five days before, and where we first had heard the rigmarole of Mogul.

We debarked among the fenny reeds and low mangroves that edged the bank of the *campong*. In the kitchens I found that the stores we had left had been ruined by the white ants. But in a tin box where the rapacious ants had been unable to get at them, I had the good fortune to find a carton of ginger-snaps of which poor Fitz had been inordinately fond.

The girl, upon biting through one of the little cakes, went into a perfect ecstasy of pleasure. I relished them myself, for of civilized food they were the first I had eaten in five days.

I knocked a coconut down from a tall palm and, upon plugging it, we drank of the white cool milk.

We were about to leave—in fact were embarking upon the *gobang*—when happily I chanced to take recognition of the orchids that lay among the fenny reeds and low mangroves on the bank of the *campong*. Crates of dried *Dendrobium* and *Vandacea* bulbs there were, and the earth-packed roots and rhizome of *Cypripedium* blooms, of bird-like *Phalanopsis* moth-orchids, and of white "Flowers of Mercy," and red "Blood Drops of God." They represented two months of the slavish work of three hunters—a handsome fortune.

I loaded the *gobang* with several crates of the rarest blooms and bulbs. I had been unable to retain any but one jewel from the Jallan Batoe; now here was our chance to get means by which to make our way in the world.



WE PROCEEDED down the river. My watch showed the hour as ten o'clock, that night, when we passed on one bank of the Barito the mud-flats, where stood on stilts the wattled huts and *tokos* of the village of Boentok. Below the town, we saw a string of dancing lights, like the moving lights on a line of night-hawks. It was some stern-wheeler of the Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij Line, dropping below the town.

Butterfly of the Dark showed visible signs of terror at the sight of this puffing, churning, dancing - eyed monster. I explained that it was but an invention of man and, quieting her thus, I hailed the stern-wheeler.

It stopped and awaited our approach. It proved to be the stern-wheeler *Duymaer van Noort* of the K. P. M. Line, the Dutch Royal Packet Navigation Company, which plies fortnightly between Banjermasin and Boentok. Given a hand by the Boegis crew, we clambered aboard, Butterfly of the Dark carrying her one-stringed fiddle and I the green-jade idol. The orchids were thrown aboard by some of the Boegis roustabouts.

I paid for the passage through to Singapore, allowing for a change of steamer at Banjermasin, with one of the emeralds I removed from the gold-wired snake in the hand of the green-jade idol. In a country where persons pay for their passage with wedge-shaped masses of crude gutta-percha, and *katties* of crystallized camfor valued at fifty dollars a *katty* or pound and a quarter, no objection could be reasonably raised to my paying with an emerald.

The Dutch purser who spoke in guttural tones that were an acute reminder of De Jong and all that was associated with him—he it was who quickly determined the value of the emerald in guilders. He returned to me, over and above the fare, some hundred and sixty guilders, or approximately seventy dollars. The emerald, though it was not overly large, was worth, then, in the neighborhood of one hundred and fifty dollars.

As I came out of the purser's office, jingling in my pocket the first bit of money I had held in many a day, I bumped into a hooded, brown-robed figure who was mumbling to himself and slapping, in leather-thonged sandals, through the darkness of the deck outside.

"Excuse me," I muttered hastily in

English. The next moment I doubted whether I should be understood in this Dyak and Dutch land.

"*Fili, nihil est,*" he returned in Latin. ("My son, it is nothing.") I heard a faint clinking, like the sound of a thin chain being rolled into the hand. And I understood. I had disturbed, as he walked up and down in the dark of the deck and recited his rosary, one of the brown-robed Capuchin priests of Dutch Borneo. He had probably just come from a visit to the mission-station at Boentok.

The idea leaped into my brain, full-fledged. Muttering something about a matter that *was* important, I drew the hooded priest into the electric-lighted saloon where waited, in a tremulous wonder, Butterfly of the Dark.

Quickly I explained to her. She nodded remotely, the while she never removed her wide eyes from the polished rose-wood furniture, the white-glowing electric-lights.

"They are like fireflies above the rice paddies," she said, referring to the incandescents. "But they are more brilliant even. Ooh, they are like the diamonds under the red torches of the *Dobo!*"

We stood before the Capuchin.

"I wish that you should marry us, Father," I said.

He expressed no surprise, only a genial willingness. A call was sent down to the purser to act as one witness; a matronly Dutch stewardess acted as the other. None of these folk showed any wonder at sight of the girl's costume of purple blouse and green pantaloons. In this Borneo land, where the Cantonese, for instance, still cling to their Chinese fashion of pantaloons for women and men, and the most of the men of other races go almost naked, while their women wear rattan corsets and little else, the costume of Butterfly of the Dark was by no means strange.

There was but one hitch in the ceremony. I had no wedding-ring. I looked about me in perplexity and distress. I saw the gold devil-chasers quivering in the electric light on the adorable forehead and red hair of Butterfly of the Dark. One was shaped like a sequin, another like a wedge of gutta-percha, another like a swastika—Ah! there was one, a plain though rather thin band of gold.

I detached the band from its golden

thread and put it upon her finger. It fitted after a fashion. It was our wedding-ring.

CHAPTER XXIX

REQUIEM

FROM Singapore, we went in a P. & O. boat, by way of the Suez Canal, to London. With the guilders and another emerald, I paid for our suite which included, in the temperate zone, a stateroom tropicaly heated for the orchid blooms. In the orchid-mart of London, I sold most of the breath-blossoms, not for pounds, but for aristocratic guineas.

I shipped on to Detroit, Michigan, to Mrs. Manasseh Jones, the widow of the millionaire automobile manufacturer, a number of the *Calogyne Lowii* and red "Blood Drops of *Deewa*" which, several months before, she had commissioned De Jong to get. Thus, in a way, did we do a service to the memory of Koenraad de Jong.

There was a service we owed to the memory of Sarsfield Pembroke Fitzhamon. Ere making the long traverse to San Francisco, the town I had left as a raw college youth, six years prior, Butterfly of the Dark and I crossed to Ireland where, in County Kerry at the foot of McGillicuddy's Reeks on the fringe of the blue Lakes of Killarney, we visited the mossy castle where Fitz was born and where his father still lived.

Behind the blackthorn hedges, in those very orchid conservatories where my wife's father, William Hyde, first had got the fever to chase orchids, there we found Fitzhamon's father, beguiling himself with his flowers—an old man, so puffed up with pride of race that, for a mere peccadillo, he had disowned his only son.

We delivered our sad message. To him, as a remembrance of his son, we gave a single wan white "Flower of Mercy" which that son had plucked from the dark heart of Borneo. We left him with his house of pride fallen about his ears, his heart broken and forgoing at last.

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
And peace of pardon win!
How else may man make straight his plan
And cleanse his soul from sin?
How else but through a broken heart
May Lord Christ enter in?

Now, as I write these last pages, there is

standing before me, on the desk, a green-jade idol with two pearls for eyes, a ball of ruby in its one hand and, in its other, a snake of strung emeralds, the gold wire, connecting them, twisted at the end where two are missing. This I have just brought out from its repository in a wall-safe, in an effort to be very exact in my description of it.

Also now, from another room, there drift to me soft plaintive sounds, as Butterfly of the Dark draws her rattan bow over the wetted single string of that fiddle which her father made and which Fitz did so much to help bring out. And these mementoes are all we have to awaken memories of our day in the Jallan Batoe.

Yet here, in the *campongs* of civilization, certain aspects of daily life cause all the horror of that short day to impinge in vivid panorama on the retina of my brain. A blind man singing for coppers on the curb-stone. . . . And I see poor De Jong, his Chinese sun-hat flapping over his bandaged eyes, clutching the Green, Green God and

mumbling crazily to the lift and pound of his stumbling feet.

But yesterday, at Lotta's Fountain, I made space, in the crowd watching the baseball score-board, for a legless newsboy who carried himself on padded hands. The crowd, at the sight, went round and round before my eyes and sank in a haze as, damp with a cold sweat, I visualized poor Hyde dragging his flabby legs beneath him over the dais floor, going down under that dagger in the hands of *Lip-Plak-Tengga*.

Often I wonder what became of the Green, Green God. I doubt whether that ape, if he lived, gave it up to the head hunters. Sometimes, in the night, I have a vision of glittering eyes in the dark—the snaky eyes of the monstrous-ape, the red eyes of the parrot, guarding in the blackness of some underground grotto of the Stone *Dobo*, that accursed and shimmering god.

And there may it lie forever for all of me and my dear little wife, Butterfly of the Dark.

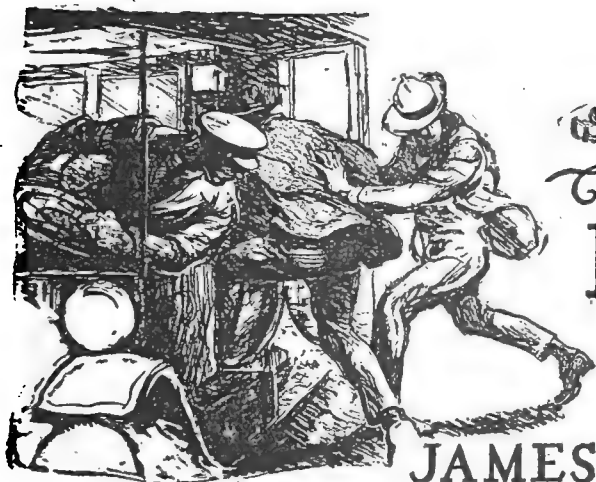
THE END

HONG KONG

By ROBERT J. PEARSALL

THE White Man's rule the Yellow Folk obey;
 For white men's gold they beg and steal and slave;
 But rabbit-warrens house their huddling horde,
 Unwashed, unshorn, from birth-mat unto grave.
 To heathen gods their strange incenses rise;
 To elder days they backward turn their eyes.

Slant eyes unseeing, and slant mind opaque
 To all that *we* have seen or done or thought—
 They, at the opening of the Newer Age,
 Stand silent, powerful, with the question fraught:
Are they the wreckage of a world that's done,
Or mighty sleepers waiting for the sun?



The BIG FLASH by JAMES B. HENDRYX

LARRIGAN, in Palm Beach and Panama, leaned lightly against a marble column and watched the incoming crowd surge through the great waiting-room. His pale blue eyes roved from face to face as, with the ease of long practise, he mentally catalogued their owners, even as he watched keenly King and Reilly, the two central office men, who chatted idly with the uniformed gate-man.

Here and there in the crowd, spinach-chins from the corn-belt ambled uncertainly along the lines of least resistance, glaring yellow valises clutched tightly in knotted fingers. Larrigan's eyes passed them without notice. The heyday of the spinach-chin had passed—or was yet to come.

He frowned impatiently at the absence of the live "come ons"—the small-town bankers and merchants who would be real devils at Coney. The crowd thinned to the inevitable stragglers, and Larrigan, rotund and perspiring, lifted his Panama and wiped the moisture from his brow with a lavender-edged handkerchief.

"Hot ain't hit?" asked a voice in his ear. Larrigan turned. By his side stood a young man, lean-faced and bronzed, whose upstanding rubber collar, glaringly impervious to wilting perspiration, seemed on the point of exploding through contact with a tightly knotted four-in-hand of flaming red.

"It is," answered Larrigan. His eyes twinkled as they strayed from the points of his own tan Oxfords to the square toes of the brand-new cowhide boots. Larrigan

was a "con man"—a "con man," that is, of parts. He was no piker, to wheedle the much-needed dollars from the pockets of the poor.

In Larrigan's bright lexicon of youth, a man who would turn a trick for less than a cool thousand, was a thief, and justly to be shunned as such. Anything more than a thousand was legitimate business, provided, of course, the transaction was free from the taint of knock-out drops and rough stuff. Moreover, Larrigan had a sense of humor. The man at his side appealed to him. About his person was doubtless concealed a hundred, or a hundred and thirty-seven real dollars—and they could stay concealed for all Larrigan cared.

But the day was conducive to only half-hearted efforts in a business way, and he decided to cultivate this man. Not with an eye for any direct or present remuneration, but for the fun of the thing, and incidentally for information. For any man, woman, or child who stepped from any train possessed information directly, or indirectly, of value to Larrigan.

It was Larrigan's not untenable theory that everybody came from some place. That every place, however remote and unobtrusive, had its richest citizen. That every richest citizen would, at some time or other, visit the metropolis. And Larrigan had an ingrown predilection for richest citizens.

His note-books, systematically and alphabetically arranged, formed an interesting directory of richest citizens—a curious

combination of "Who's Who" and "Bradstreet," to which was added a compendium of useful information anent family, friends, and foibles. Indeed, no fact that Larrigan could glean regarding a richest citizen was too inconsequential to be chronicled. Therefore Larrigan smiled genially into the weather-tanned face at his side.

"Sho' is hot," reiterated the man, warming to the smile.

"By which I take it you do not hail from Yuma. They tell me that the Yuma bench has got hell backed off the map, for heat."

"Ain't never sot on hit. But ef hit's any-ways hotter'n what the bench in front of Judge Haliday's sto' gits, 'long 'bout two o'clock in the even'n', I don't want to set on hit."

Larrigan chuckled:

"You mean Judge Haliday of——"

He paused adroitly, and the stranger finished his sentence, speaking eagerly, as of a mutual friend.

"Sho', Judge Haliday of Splitrock! Yo' know him?"

"Well, I don't know as I can say I know him, but——"

"Seen him up to Jackson, I reck'n," drawled the other. "He holds co't in Jackson. Lots of fo'ks thinks he lives the'h, but he don't. He's bo'n and fotched up in Splitrock, an' his pap befo' him."

Larrigan nodded emphatically.

"That's so! I did hear the Judge lived in Splitrock. You hail from there yourself, don't you?"

The mountaineer drew himself up proudly.

"Yes, seh. That is, I live 'bout three mile up a holler that runs into West Branch 'bout four mile 'bove the town. Gabe Rollins, my name is. My pap an' Judge Haliday's has laid a many a night, side by side in the lau'l back yondeh, when they was redden' the maount'ns of them —— Walkers an' Junkers."

The man's eyes flashed dangerously. Larrigan laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"I never did hear the straight of that trouble. Seems to me someone said Judge Haliday himself was mixed up in it."

"Wall he worn't!" vigorously denied the other. "Me an' him was boys together, an' we was too li'l them days. Time we was able to pack a gun, they worn't a Walker nor a Junker left in the Cumbe'lan's. I

wouldn't be into hit now if Sam Walker hadn't——"

"Come on," said Larrigan, "let's hunt a cooler place. I'll knock off for the day and we'll hunt up something with ice in it."

"What yo' do for a livin'?"

The question came abruptly, and Larrigan was conscious that the brown eyes were regarding him critically.

"I am connected with the police," he answered glibly. "I am a detective."

The mountaineer smiled:

"I know'd hit. I watched yo' quite a spell, while yo' was lookin' the fo'ks over, an' I seen how yo' kep' yo' eye on them two pert-lookin' fellehs that was talkin' to the man by the fence. Hit don't take no detective to pintedly see them two was a pair of thieves. I know'd hit soon as I seen 'em."

Larrigan chuckled audibly.

"You're right," he said. "Get your grip and we'll beat it out of this infernal heat."

"Git which?"

"Your grip—your bag—your suit-case—or keester—or whatever you carry your stuff in."

"I didn't bring none. I don't aim to stay in N'Yo'k no longer'n what hit'll take me to find Sam Walker."

"Come on then," said Larrigan, and led the way to the street.

II



A HALF hour later, seated at a small iron-legged table in a rear room of a Seventh Avenue saloon, Gabe Rollins recounted to Larrigan the history of a feud. The while Larrigan, with arms resting on the table-top, sipped from a tall glass in which ice clinked, and stored in his memory names and facts for future reference. The mountaineer paused at the point where the last of the Junkers "got his'n, an' ol' Ranse Walker jes' nach'ly picked up an' tuck out'n the maount'ns with Sam."

Larrigan drained his glass and pressed a button.

"Better try a rickey, Gabe," he suggested, as a white-aproned figure appeared in the doorway. "They're cooler than that stuff."

The mountaineer shook his head.

"A li'l mo' red licker'll do me. I don't aim fo' to try no new-fash'n drinks, and I

couldn't admire fo' no ice to be bumpin' ag'in my nose, nohow."

"Fill 'em up, then," said Larrigan, "and bring us a couple of those Porto Ricoes."

The mountaineer swallowed his whisky and lighted his cigar.

"This Sam Walker," suggested Larrigan, "you came here to find him?"

Again the man's eyes flashed dangerously. He dug impatiently at his rubber collar, as if its stiffness irritated him.

"Yes, I did," he answered, "an' the soon-eh I git stahsted the soon-eh I'll find him."

He loosened the buttons of his black "store coat," and Larrigan saw, strapped beneath his left arm, a yellow leather holster, from which protruded the black butt of an automatic.

"Where does your friend live?"

"My friend!" cried the mountaineer. And Larrigan saw that the brown eyes fairly glared. "Don't yo' go call Sam Walker my friend! They never was a Rollins yit 'twould own friends with a Walker an' him least of all!"

"That's all right," soothed Larrigan hastily. "Of course, I knew he was no friend of yours. It was just a way of speaking."

Rollins settled back in his chair, mollified.

"Hit sho' riles me fo' to be called friends with Sam Walker." He leaned forward and regarded Larrigan with new interest. "Say, yo' lived 'round heah long?"

Larrigan nodded.

"All my life," he said.

"Well, me'be yo' know Sam?"

Larrigan hesitated, drumming the table with his fingers.

"Sam Walker—Sam Walker—Sam Walker," he repeated. "Seems to me I have heard that name, somewhere. How long has he lived here in New York?"

The mountaineer knit his brows.

"Le's see," he mused, "hit was back in '96 when they-all tuck out'n the maount'ns—him and ol' man Walker. Time run on, an' we hear'n how ol' man Walker was dead an' Sam was railroadin' over on the C. & O.

"Then, two yeah ago, all to onct, Sam showed up in Splitrock. Hit was right after the surveyors had been through the maount'ns an' run lines, an' druve stakes to mahk out the coal trac'. Sam, he was all rigg'd out in sto' clo's an' a big gold watch-chain

'crost his front, and he brung a lawyer with him.

"I was settin' in the sto' talkin' to Jedge Haliday, when they-all druve up in a buck-boad. Sam he was pert and briggity, like he was comin' back 'mongst ol' friends. Spite of the years he'd be'n gone, I know'd him the minute I sot eyes on him and I never looked twict. Hit was 'nough fer me, that a Walker was back on West Branch, and I jumped down off'n the counteh and tuck out'n the back do'.

"You see, after ol' man Junker was out of the way, an' all the Walkers, too, things kin' of quieted down a bit 'round Splitrock, and we'd kin' of got out'n the notion of packin' guns, but up theh in the cabin my ol' pap's rifle-gun hung 'crost the deer-ho'ns oveh the fireplace; and a new one of my own 'long with hit—and they was always loaded too—loaded an' ready fo' the fust Walker that showed his face on West Branch. I aimed to git them guns and cut 'crost to the road befo' Sam Walker could git out of the maount'ns.

"Jes' as I was 'bout to jump off the back stoop, I felt a hand on my shouldeh and I whirled 'round, reachin' fo' my knife. But it was Jedge Haliday. 'Hol' on, Gabe,' he says. 'Don't do hit.'

"'Don't do what?' I says. 'My God, man, don't you know that's Sam Walker?' 'Yes,' the Jedge says kin' of soft like. 'I know, but times has changed, Gabe, heah in the maount'ns—changed fo' the betteh.'

"'But he's a Walker!' I hollers. 'An' didn't the Walkers an' them damn Junkers git two of my uncles, an' my brotkeh?'

"'Yes, Gabe,' says the Jedge, 'they done that. But don't forgit they got my pap, too. An' two of my sistehs is widows because the Junkers an' the Walkers could shoot straight. An' don't forgit this: that they's Junker widows and Walker widows, too, left in the maount'ns—'cause the Rollins an' the Halidays could shoot a li'l straighteh. Don't do nothing you'll be sorry fo', Gabe,' he says, ' 'cause the sher-iff'll sho' git yo' an' you'll spend the rest of yo' life behine prison-bahs, down to Frankfo't. I know'd Walker was comin'. He don't aim to stay. He's jes' up heah to sell out to the coal comp'ny them ol' side-hill weed patches that was onct the co'n-fields of the Walkers. Let him go. Sam hisself didn't do none of the shootin', no mo' than yo' or me did. He was too li'l

them days. Besides the maount'ns is gittin' civilized. The coal combine has tuck a holt on West Branch. They-all won't stand fo' no shootin'. An' soon they'll be payin' us mo' money than we evah hea'd tell of.'

"'But he's a Walker,' I says, 'an' they neveh was a Walker yit but his heaht was black as a niggeh's hide. Yo' cain't trust 'em no mo'n what yo' could trust a copphe-head. And ef we don't git him, I tell yo' they'll be graves to dig in these heah maoun't'ns 'fo' Fall.'

"'No, they won't,' says Judge Haliday. 'Gabe, yo' a hot-head! I tell yo' times has changed. Cain't yo' take my wo'd fo' hit? Have I evah lied to yo'?'

"'No,' says I. 'Yo' ain't. Yo' know mo'n what I do. Yo've be'n down to Lexington to school. Yo' a lawyer an' a jedge.'

"'I'm mo'n that, Gabe,' he says. 'I'm yo' friend. Listen to me: ef anythin' happens I'll take the blame!'

The mountaineer paused and ran his fingers around the edge of his rubber collar.

"'Bout some things the Jedge was right: 'Bout the law, an' the coal combine, an' that they'd be payin' us mo' money than we evah know'd they was.'

He thrust a hand into the side pocket of his coat and drew forth a roll of bills—a roll of yellow-back bills. Larrigan almost gasped.

"Their main tippie is on my land an' they're payin' me one hund'ed dollahs a day, minium royalties, fo' lettin' 'em take out the coal. But, 'bout the otheh things, the Jedge was wrong.'

The man called loudly for the waiter and ordered more liquor, which he drank at a gulp. While Larrigan, his face a study, sipped at his rickey and waited.

"Well, I listen'd to Judge Haliday an' befo' the lau'l bloomed ag'in, they was a new grave dug in the ya'd of the li'l church-house on West Branch. She was Nancy Slocum," he continued in a dull, toneless voice. "She was promised to me. We was goin' to git married when the tippie was finished an' royalties begin to come in. Her fo'ks lived on ol' man Junker's place, 'crost the maount'ns that lays next to Sam's pap's ol' cabin, that Sam patched up an' was livin' in while the surveyors was runnin' his lines. He bo'ded with her fo'ks, an' hung 'round 'til the middle of the Summeh an' then, sudden, he skipped out.

"The first I know'd anythin' was wrong

was one night in the early Fall. A wet an' drizzlin' night, hit was, with cold rain drop-pin' from the limbs an' a drippin' on to the dead leaves makin' 'em into a wet brown sog. I'd be'n down to the sto' that day, an' when I come home theh she was, all huddled up on the puncheon that was the do'-step to my cabin. She'd be'n cryin' 'til hit seemed like she couldn't cry no mo', an' she tol' me 'bout hit in a voice that sounded like she didn't care ef she lived or died. Her fo'ks had done kick'd her out and I tuck her oveh to ol' Aunt Sallie Means's that lives up on the head of Owl Crick. Then, I went back home—back to my cabin.

"I taken down my pap's ol' rifle-gun an' tromped to Judge Haliday's sto' an' sot theh in the drizzlin' rain on the stoop 'til mo'nin'. The Jedge's house is next to the sto' an', come daylight, I hearn the gate creak, an' next thing I know'd Judge Haliday hisself stood the'h in the road.

"'Gabel' he says. 'Gabel' like that. 'My God, man! What's happened?'

"And then I riz up with my pap's ol' rifle-gun in my hand.

"'What's happened,' I says, 'is what I done tol' yo' would happen—only a thousand times worse. An' what wouldn't hev happened ef I hadn't listened to yo' in this sto' that day.'

"Seemed like an hour the Jedge stood there in the mud of the red, clay road. His eyes was tu'ned down, an' his shouldehs look'd bent an' ol'. Then he look'd up. His shouldehs squa'd and he look'd me straight in the eye.

"'Sam Walker's gone, Gabe,' he says. 'Gone where yo' prob'ly cain't find him. I tol' yo' that day ef anythin' happened I'd take the blame!'

"It seemed to me, while we stood the'h in the mud an' the rain, that all his life he'd neveh be'n such a good friend to me as then.

"'What yo' waitin' fo', Gabe?' he says kin' of quick an' jerky like, 'fer God's sake shoot!'

"'I'm goin' to,' I says, an' I pulled back the hammeh and raised my pap's ol' rifle gun 'til the sights lined square ag'in his heaht."

Again the mountaineer paused, and Larrigan, with fingers clutching the table-edge, stared into the man's eyes.

"Go on!" he said huskily, with an

impatient movement of his hand—a movement that sent the rickey-glass crashing to the floor.

"Me'be," drawled the mountaineer, "ef I'd tuck my new gun 'stead of pap's ol' one, I'd 'a' killed Jedge Haliday. But, somehow, with my finger on the triggeh, hit come oveh me, and to onct, like some one hit me with a club, that fo' the fust time a Rollins gun was pintoed at a Haliday heah't.

"I don't rightly know jest what happened. All I know I turned an' brought the bar'l of the gun down on the thick planks of the sto' stoop. I rememb'r trompin' over the gun, bar'l an' stock, layin' in two pieces in the mud. An' I went back to my cabin. But 'tworn't neveh the same, sense. She died that Winteh. Seemed like she didn't want to live, nohow. A baby come an' they both died an' we buried 'em in the li'l grave-yahd. After that I sta'ted huntin' fo' Sam Walker. I thought the coal men could he'p me, seein' how they must be payin' him royalties. But, jest befo' he went away, he done sold out an' give a deed to his land. I done tol' yo' how we hearn Sam had railroaded, so I traveled oveh the railroads quite a spell, an' then, two days ago et was, a brakeman on the C. & O. tol' me he seen Sam Walker in a saloon in N'Yo'k. Said how he'd quit railroadin' an' got a job in the saloon, an' when he hearn 'bout the coal combine runnin' their tracks up to Splitrock he went back to the maount'ns.

"He was a friendly lad—that brakeman. An' when I tol' him why I was huntin' Sam, he says to me: 'Yo' hunt him in N'Yo'k. When they onct git theh they stay. It gits in the blood; an' now he's got money—he'll go back. Yes, seh,' he says, 'yo' hunt him in N'Yo'k—and good luck to yo'.' So I come."

Larrigan nodded. In spite of himself, he could not confine his thoughts entirely to that roll of big bills.

"What sort of looking fellow was he—this Sam Walker?" he asked, as with the tips of his tan Oxfords he moved the broken fragments of the rickey-glass into a rough pattern on the floor.

"He's a big man, raisin' six foot in his socks, an' wide and thick. He's dressed up like city fo'ks does, with a big yellah watch-chain, thick as a well-roppe, an' a big diamon' in his necktie, an' mo' of 'em on his finge's. He had six or seven rings on to his finge's that flashed an' shined like a

mica dump. An' the ha'r on his top lip was black as coal, an' trimmed short and ugly, like the end of a still-swab."

The mountaineer ceased speaking, and Larrigan, his eyes narrowed to slits, stared intently at the scattered fragments of glass on the floor. Presently he looked up and regarded the other intently.

"Gabe," he said, "us fellows on the force ain't supposed to take on any private business. But—well, you see, the pay ain't so much; and once in a while, if there is anything in it, we stretch the rules a point. New York is a big place. You might walk the streets for ten years without ever running across your man, even if he is here. I know New York. It is my business to hunt men. You haven't given me much to go on, but if the price is right——"

"Ef you pint out Sam Walker to me," broke in the mountaineer, "I'll give you five thousan' dollahs cash money an' call hit a bargain."

"How much have you got with you?" Larrigan asked.

"Five thousan' dollahs."

Larrigan considered.

"I'll take it," he said, at length. "But, how about the getaway?"

"The which?" asked the other, with a puzzled look.

"The getaway. Suppose I give you the sign, and you bump him off—what then? Three minutes after the job is pulled, the street will be full of harness bulls and dicks, and they'll can you before you can ditch your gun."

"Yo' mean the sheriff'll jail me?"

Larrigan nodded.

"Well, he can do hit an' welcome. I don't aim to try to git away. All I want is to meet up with Sam Walker. After that, I don't care. Hit ain't like as ef— Well the maount'ns ain't the same no mo', nohow. No seh, they ain't no jail-house could be as neah like hell as that cabin. Why, seh, on rainy days—when the woods is all drippin', seems like—well, mo'n onct I've rech up and tuck down that gun, fer—to—to— But then, seems like I always see Sam Walker's face, an' I puttin' the gun back till I——"

Again Larrigan nodded.

"I see," he said, and then in a brisker tone— "Where you stoppin'?"

"I do' know. Ain't thought of stoppin' nowheres. I jest got off the train, when I

seen yo', an' how yo' was the only one that didn't look like yo' was in no-hurry to git nowheres. Reck'n me'be yo' could tell me where to go?"

"Come with me," said Larrigan, and led the way to the street, followed by the eyes of the white-aproned man at the bar.

III



IN THE complex farrago of the underworld, the pot of human emotion seeths with an intensity entirely foreign to the existence of the ordinary citizen. Enmities are formed. Situations arise and are met with startling swiftness, and with a raw, brutish ferocity.

Even in the height of his glory the denizen of gangland has but slight tenure upon existence. For the fangs of the powers that prey are whetted upon their own kind. With society at large, they have no quarrel, their interest being merely one of property. Gold is their god. "Something for nothing," their creed. Excitement their bread of existence.

Gamblers all, from the common dip and horse poisoner to the high-grade bank burglar and the suave confidence man; ninety per cent. of their ill-gotten gain changes hands across the green cloth. Stuss and the ponies come in for the lion's share, with faro-bank and roulette a poor second.

Thus it was that, when the word was passed, a certain house on East Houston Street became a pack-moot for the wolves of society. A pool-room sprang into being, and stuss was dealt at innumerable tables for stakes that appealed to plunger and piker alike. The proprietor of this hangout soon became known to gangland under the moniker of the "Big Flash." The wise ones stated knowingly that his backers and co-partners were no other than a certain captain and lieutenant of police. Concerning his record none knew to a certainty. He was variously reported to be a Philadelphia blackmailer, and a 'Frisco politician, who had come East for his wife's health. Rumor had it, also, that the Big Flash bore more than a striking resemblance to a certain Bowery bouncer, who a year previous had voluntarily and precipitously decamped, following the threat of one Spanish Louis to eat his gizzard. However, Spanish Louis, the real party in interest, had come to a sudden and violent end. And, as such rise

to opulence was entirely without the probabilities, in gangland's estimate of a Bowery bouncer, this rumor was given small credence.

The fact that interested gangland was that over on East Houston Street it could be robbed in comfort and quietude, and that so long as the Big Flash split squarely with the dicks, it could continue to be so robbed.

With others came Larrigan, prince among con men and an inveterate gambler. Nightly he bucked the "big bank." Upon rare occasions he won. But luck is a puny weapon with which to combat the mathematical certainty of the deadly "split."

Night after night, or rather during the very small hours of the morning, he smiled into the eyes of the Big Flash, as he collected his "viggresh," the munificent fifteen per cent. which the stuss banker hands back to his victims. Larrigan was no fool. He knew, and accepted the odds of the split. He gambled to satisfy an inherent love for gambling, and begrudged not his losings.

But of late, other odds had become a factor in Larrigan's scheme of existence—odds that struck directly at the profits of his "legitimate business," and which Larrigan began to connect directly with the co-partnership between the Big Flash and the captain and lieutenant of police.

Where gangland foregathers it talks, and the fact that the dicks had been hep, and had demanded exorbitant toll from the proceeds of several jobs, which he distinctly remembered to have framed in collusion with his side kicker, the Squint, at the stuss tables in the Big Flash's joint, fomented a sullen and growing rage in the heart of Larrigan. And the tenure of life of the Big Flash strengthened inversely as the rage in Larrigan's heart grew.

But Larrigan did not cease his visits to the East Houston Street hangout where he cultivated the Big Flash with a purpose.

"The — fool," the con man growled to himself in the seclusion of his own apartment on West Eleventh Street. "He can't see that the bulls are double-crossing him, getting their mitts on the kale before it ever gets to his tables. He's a double-crosser himself and a rapper, but, believe me, he ain't so far from the end of his string."

Nevertheless the actual frame-up of the Big Flash was a matter to be undertaken not lightly. For Larrigan knew that because

of the connection of the Big Flash with the police, even the most daring of East-Side gun-men would balk at his bumping off. Therefore, Larrigan was biding his time and, therefore, also, his chance acquaintance with Gabe Rollins suddenly assumed an importance in his scheme of things out of all proportion to mere financial remuneration. Even as he sat at the table in the Seventh Avenue saloon, the idea flashed upon him that Gabe Rollins, his mind inflamed with revenge, could be made to see in the Big Flash, the Sam Walker of the Kentucky hills. For the Big Flash had derived his moniker from the multiplicity of the "sparklers" that flashed from scarf-pin and finger-rings. And his close-cropped mustache was black as jet.

IV



IN HIS deliberate cultivation of the Big Flash, Larrigan had learned many things. Chiefest among which, viewed in the light of present circumstance, was the fact that the stuss-joint proprietor would be in no wise averse to turning a trick on the outside; provided, of course, that the risk was minimized and the emolument alluring.

Gabe Rollins dined at Larrigan's expense and later accompanied him to his rooms, after which the pseudo-detective, with a parting injunction to the mountaineer to await his return, quit the apartment on West Eleventh Street and strolled leisurely toward the East Houston Street hangout. Early as it was, stuss was in full swing, and Larrigan noted almost with a sneer the tense eagerness with which the players watched the turning of the cards.

Proceeding without show of haste toward the "big bank," behind which was the heavily screened cashier's cage, Larrigan returned the smiling greetings of the dealer and look-out. Inside the cage the Big Flash turned from checking up the cash register and, in answer to a swift look, indicated with a jerk of his head the door of a closet-like rear room.

Larrigan entered and was followed a moment later by the Big Flash, who had paused to whisper certain instructions to his cashier. The proprietor indicated a chair, and, as the two seated themselves on either side of a small deal table, Larrigan noted that the stones on the heavily be-

ringed fingers sparkled softly in the dim light of the single incandescent—noted, also, the wide, thick frame, and the close-cropped ugliness of the bristling, black mustache.

"What's up?" asked the man.

"Want in on something good?"

"How good? What's the lay?"

Larrigan leaned his elbows on the table and placed the tips of his fingers together.

"Fifty thousand," he answered coolly, and noted with satisfaction the look of avarice that leaped into the other's eyes. The Big Flash was hooked. "It's this way," he continued, "I can't swing this alone, and the 'Squint' is no good on this job. It takes a man with front. You got the front, see?"

Larrigan's glance lingered upon the sparkling fingers.

"That's me!" admitted the other, wriggling his fingers ostentatiously. "How do we work it?"

"Easiest thing you know," answered Larrigan with a grin as he withdrew from beneath his coat a rather bulky, black leather case. "He's a high-toned Mexican gent, and he's buying supplies for the insurgents. Paying spot-cash in good American yellow-backs, and he carries them in a case like this. I got this one made today and, believe me, it's a dead ringer for his. You're the president of an ammunition company. I'm your agent.

"The agents of the de facto Mexican Government are on the trail of the Mexican gent. They're shadowing him pretty close, and he ain't keen on their finding out who he's doing business with. I bring him around to talk business with you, but I tell him he's got to show the kale. All you got to do is to talk contracts and big figures, while I switch the cases. I've got a room all picked out for the job up on East Thirty-fourth Street. Then you and I step out into the hall for a private talk, turn the key on the Mexican gent, and beat it back to East Houston Street."

"You're on, Larry!" eagerly assented the Big Flash. "But how does she split?"

Larrigan leaned forward.

"She splits," he answered, "fifty-fifty, that is, unless you want to drag in your——"

The other interrupted with a gesture.

"Can that! This here's yours and mine," he grinned knowingly. "And when do we pull the job?"

"Twelve o'clock to-night. I'll slip out now and see that he throws off his shadows and gets into the house safe. I'll meet you at quarter to twelve, on the corner of Thirty-fourth and Third Avenue, and we'll slip up to the room together."

At eleven-thirty, a very ordinary-looking touring-car turned into Thirty-fourth Street from Fifth Avenue. At Second Avenue it turned southward and drew up to the curb a few feet from the corner. Two men stepped out and the driver shut off his power. Then, very deliberately, he tested his self-starter, and, with a satisfied nod, shut it off again. The driver was the Squint, who also nursed a grievance against the Big Flash, and he remained in his seat ready for instant action.

Larrigan taking the mountaineer by the arm walked swiftly around the corner into Thirty-fourth Street, and, proceeding to the third house, pushed the man gently into the dark shadow of an areaway beside the stone steps.

"Steady now," he whispered, "keep up your nerve. In about ten minutes I'll be back with your man. We will stop here and look at the number of the house—then it's up to you. Shoot quick and, for God's sake, shoot straight! And then we'll beat it to the machine."

Gabe Rollins nodded.

"I aim to," he said, and Larrigan caught the swift glint of a street light upon the blue-black barrel of the gun.

Five minutes later the Big Flash joined Larrigan on the corner of Third Avenue.

"How's things?" he asked eagerly.

"Fine," answered Larrigan. "Come on! But first pull off those gloves. Give that ice a chance. It's front for yours."

The Big Flash complied with a grin, and the two men walked rapidly toward Second Avenue. At the third house from the

corner Larrigan paused apparently searching for the number.

There was a movement in the deep shadow of the areaway, and an instant later a man stood facing them upon the sidewalk—a tall, gaunt man whose weather-bronzed features showed tense and hard, and very distinctly in the feeble light of the street lamp.

One swift look and the Big Flash with a wheezy, throaty gasp, staggered backward. His eyes widened in horror, and the thick, heavy lips showed wet and flabby beneath his bristling mustache.

"My God!" he gasped in a high, thin voice. "Gabe—Gabe Rollins!"

The heavily jeweled fingers groped at the throat and Larrigan, bewildered, saw that the forehead glistened with sweat. Then—a red spurt of flame, and another, and another. And three shots rang almost as one throughout the hollow aisle of the deserted street.

The Big Flash rocked in his tracks. His knees sagged slowly and he pitched forward across the sidewalk. Larrigan stepped over the motionless form and a minute later, when the pavement of Thirty-fourth Street rang to the rap of locust night-sticks, a very ordinary-looking touring-car shot from Second Avenue into Thirty-third Street and sped toward the Pennsylvania Station.

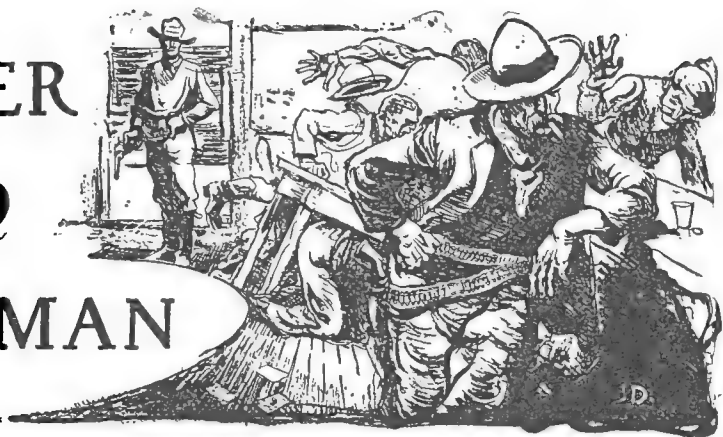
"Yo've earnt yo' pay," said the mountaineer grimly. "I'm obleeged to yo'."

"Well—I'll be —!" murmured Larrigan as his fingers closed mechanically about the thick roll of bills, that Gabe Rollins extended toward him.

Hastily stripping several bills from the outside of the roll he thrust them into the mountaineer's hands.

"Take 'em," he said, "and go back to your mountains! It's—it's your getaway—your 'viggresh!'"

The KILLER The KID And the BAD MAN



by

NEVIL G. HENSHAW

Author of "The Black Violin," "A Pair of Mules," etc.

THE Bad Man was born, bred and christened in the Panhandle of Texas. I put the "christened" last as it does not refer to his infant baptism, but to the bestowal of a war name some twenty years later. This name—Waist-high Wilkins—leaves little to be explained. Our Bad Man shot from the hip, and shot both often and well.

Indeed, so persistent was he in his efforts to live up to his title that he eventually found it expedient to remove himself to some unexplored, and therefore less intolerant, field of endeavor. Accordingly, having received an offer from a Wild West show, he departed upon a tour of the East.

For a time Waist-high Wilkins broke glass balls with shot cartridges, fired blanks at tame Indians, and performed various other atrocities against the ethics of his profession. The closing of the season found him utterly bored by a life that did not demand, nay that even forbade, a sure-enough load in one's gun. However, it is probable that he would have stuck it out, but for an incident that occurred in the city of New Orleans.

It was in the morning, after the street parade, and Waist-high Wilkins, his throat parched by the recent exhibition, was in search of liquid refreshment. As he jogged along close to the curb, he presently encountered a lady accompanied by a small boy. At sight of him the small boy held

back, his eyes wide with awe and admiration.

"Look at the cowboy, mama!" he cried.

The lady, ignorant despite the clamor of innumerable bill-boards, made prompt denial.

"Come along," she ordered sharply. "There are no cowboys in the city. It is only some moving-picture actor."

This was too much. Forgetting his thirst, Waist-high Wilkins loped promptly back and demanded an interview with the manager. Shortly after, paid and fired, he rode out of the show business forever.

Scorning railroads, he paused only long enough to load up with ball cartridges before he turned his pony's head toward the setting sun.

II



HAD Gab Denbo dwelt beyond the Texas line, he too would have been called a bad man. As it was he lived well to the east of the Sabine River, in the Cajun country of southwestern Louisiana, and was therefore known as a "killer."

However, this was as it should be, since the difference between a bad man and a killer is not merely a question of State lines and points of the compass. In most cases the bad man kills either through necessity or a too lively appreciation of the privileges of intoxication. The killer slays methodically and in cold blood, usually as a matter

of business, in some rare instances for reasons of personal satisfaction. Also, whereas the bad man is more or less willing to accept the various risks incidental to his calling, the killer never takes a chance.

It is said that nothing is certain but death and taxes. To those versed in the ways of killers, this adage appears incomplete.

Gab Denbo became a killer through the simple expedient of tackling his first job at an opportune moment. To begin with he shot his man on the streets of St. Pierre during a parish election. In addition he was forced into the quarrel, his escape being due chiefly to the eccentricities of his victim's aim. Having emerged from the conflict to find that the onlookers were unanimous in their praise of his marksmanship, Denbo immediately decided that, if the authorities were kind, he would make prompt and proper use of his newly discovered talent.

Thus, when the authorities ignored his escapade as a mere election disturbance, he abandoned a vague and intermittent pursuit of odd jobs in the parish and took up his residence in St. Pierre. Here, having allied himself with the political party then in power, he shot his way into such prominence that a half-dozen years sufficed to send him back to the parish again.

This exile, however, was not due to any pressure of the law. Indeed, as an analyst of the vagaries of the usual grand jury, Denbo was without a peer. It was solely through the efforts of certain bereaved ones to pot-shot him unawares that he was forced to seek a safe retreat.

Therefore, having repaired to a convenient strip of sea marsh, the Killer cut a narrow, boggy path through the tall grass and knocked up a hut at its farther end. Here he managed to dwell in a security that was as a thorn in the side of those who formed the better element at St. Pierre.

III



THE Kid hailed from an Eastern university. His name was James Winthrop Meredith, and he came to St. Pierre to study the agricultural methods of that section. Had he been content with the fulfillment of this mission, I would have no story to tell.

The Kid, however, was possessed of the

restless ambition peculiar to undergraduates. His studies completed, he remained to criticize and instruct. Later he developed an intense and unfortunate interest in the bayou that bordered the rear of the town.

From the first this bayou delighted the Kid. He bathed in it, he rowed on it, often, when the moon was full, he spent long hours in rapt appreciation of the black and silver that laced its placid bosom. Thus, when with the advent of Summer the bayou changed from an enchanted stream into a noisome sewer, the Kid received a distinct shock.

Upon inquiry he learned that this change was the work of Belvue, the huge refinery above the town. It appeared that, with the running off of the second and third sugars, the pans of the refinery were left indescribably sticky and foul. As the bottoms of these pans were fitted with coils of copper piping, the task of cleaning them by hand involved a considerable expenditure of time and money. Therefore the refinery folk had conceived the idea of filling the pans with a strong solution of acid, which ate away the foulness from the piping, leaving it bright and new. Afterward the acid was drawn off into the bayou, poisoning the water, killing the fish, and choking the atmosphere with a reek that was well-nigh unbearable.

Naturally the Kid declared it an outrage that a whole community should suffer for the benefit of a single enterprise.

To this the inhabitants replied with patient shrugs. Perhaps it was an outrage, they admitted. But what could one do when sugar was king?

At once the Kid became an anarchist. Since these timid Frenchmen had subjugated themselves to "King Cane," he deemed it his duty as a free American citizen to interfere. Accordingly he espoused the cause of the bayou folk, working to such good purpose that in the ensuing three weeks he was thrice visited by an emissary of the "king."

This emissary was no less a person than Monsieur Pesson, manager of Belvue, an individual renowned for his powers of persuasion. Upon his first visit Monsieur Pesson was politely remonstrative. His second concluded with a vague hint at certain unfortunate consequences. Visit number three found Monsieur Pesson bankrupt

of patience, yet courteous to the end. In parting he uttered an ultimatum that was a rare and artistic blending of bribe and threat.

When the Kid replied to this by offering to knock the manager's head off, Monsieur Pesson smiled sadly and beat a dignified retreat. The affair had now passed beyond him. He was essentially a man of words, not of deeds.

Now, although the bayou folk were only too well aware of the methods of the "king," they made no sign. That they should warn their champion did not occur to even the most bitter of them. In the first place the Kid was a stranger. In the second there would probably be some fun.

At St. Pierre, any interference with such a prospect would have approached close to sacrilege.

IV



FOLLOWING his final interview with the Kid, Monsieur Pesson wasted no time. Only waiting until it was dark enough for him to travel unobserved, he had a horse saddled and set out for the sea marsh and the hut of Gab Denbo.

Being warned by the pop and suck of the marsh of the approach of a horseman, the Killer held his visitor off with a Winchester while he ordered him to dismount and come forward with his hands above his head. As the mud was deep, and Monsieur Pesson was short and stout, he arrived at the hut in a fume of indignation.

"*Dieu*, my friend!" he exploded, after the Killer had permitted him to come inside. "You are certainly not very nice with your company."

The Killer smiled amiably. He was a lean, tanned, rather mild-looking Cajun, with thin, sunburned hair, and shifty brown eyes.

"Perhaps so, m'sieu," he admitted. "Nevertheless I must take certain precautions. In the daylight I have little trouble in looking out for myself. At night the mud is my danger signal. True there are those who have sought to come around under cover of the grass, but they have met with little success. Back of me the marsh is pitted with quicksands."

Monsieur Pesson accepted this explanation with a calmer spirit. There had been

times in his life when he had wished for quicksands himself.

"So," he continued. "I appreciate your difficulties. And now for my business. As you may know I am in charge at Belvue where, through the efforts of a meddling stranger, we are in danger of serious inconvenience. I have come to ask if you will serve us in the matter."

The Killer made a gesture of impatience. He considered this preliminary beating about the bush as absurd as it was useless.

"You can be exact?" he demanded.

"Absolutely," returned Monsieur Pesson. "It is this way. As you have perhaps noticed, the grinding of sugar is a sticky business. Thus, at the end of the season, the coils in our pans are always gummed up. Now, if through reasons of economy, we are forced to use acid in cleaning them——"

The Killer interrupted brusquely.

"Come, m'sieu," he ordered. "Either get down to business or get out. Why waste words on one who has been choked a thousand times by the fumes of your cursed acid? Who is your meddler, what has he done, and how do you wish to dispose of him?"

For a brief space Monsieur Pesson preserved an uncomfortable silence. It was not his custom to go about a delicate affair in so abrupt a fashion. Before replying he glanced uneasily about the hut.

"The meddler's name is Meredith," said he in a low voice. "He is a young student from a college in the North, and of late he has been particularly offensive. Not only has he listened to the complaints of those who live along the bayou, he has even called upon such of them as are educated for statements in writing. He declares that he will bring these statements before the next legislature. Now when I inform you that, during the investigation of a few years ago, I was forced to swear that I had never known a time when the water of the bayou was unfit to drink, you will perhaps appreciate the delicacy of my position."

The Killer nodded thoughtfully. Here was something that he could well understand.

"I see, m'sieu," said he. "Also I have heard of your meddler. They say that he is little more than a boy—what you might call a kid. You wish him killed?"

At this Monsieur Pesson became almost apoplectic with anxiety.

"Hold, hold, my friend!" he hastened to exclaim. "No one has said anything about killing, myself least of all. I have merely asked your aid in the untangling of a business problem. If now this young Meredith should receive a scare, or at most a slight injury, it might induce him to remove his activities elsewhere. In this event we would both be benefited."

The Killer rose.

"*Bien, m'sieu,*" said he. "I will consider the matter. If, after noon tomorrow, you will consult my friend Judge Bebon, he will advise you of my decision. For the rest, I congratulate you upon the advantages of your situation. Free man though I am, I am forced occasionally to be honest with myself."

Making no reply, Monsieur Pesson floundered miserably to his horse. When at last he emerged from the sea marsh, he heaved a profound and pious sigh of relief. Never before, he assured himself, had he come in contact with so absolute a barbarian.

V

 IN THE dawn of the following morning the Killer saddled his pony and set off toward St. Pierre. Two miles out he turned off into a by-road that led to the home of his friend and adviser Judge Bebon.

Judge Bebon, although a judge in name only, was a man of varied accomplishments. He was a clever lawyer, a finished politician. In addition he excelled in the collecting and storing away of innumerable minutiae regarding the life of the parish.

If a child were born, Judge Bebon would know its sex, its weight, and its probable name within twelve hours of its arrival. If a stranger happened along, he could give a complete account of his intentions and behavior, provided the stranger showed any intention of remaining. Afterward he would follow the careers of both child and stranger with the same unflagging interest.

From this it will be seen that Judge Bebon was deserving of both fear and respect. His actual elevation to the bench was admitted to be merely a matter of his own desires.

As Judge Bebon rose early, Denbo discovered him in the act of finishing his

breakfast. Therefore the Killer drew out a chair and accepted the inevitable cup of coffee.

"Well," inquired Judge Bebon, after his family had discreetly withdrawn. "You have something on hand?"

"Exactly," replied the Killer, and plunged into details.

When he had finished, Judge Bebon occupied a full five minutes with silent reflection. Like Monsieur Pesson he was both short and stout, but there the resemblance ceased entirely. Where the manager was red and impetuous, the judge was pale and composed. Also Judge Bebon preserved a stolid dignity that was a triumph of histrionic art. Through long years of practise he had contrived to make a clever rogue appear a pompous fool.

"It is all right," he announced finally. "As a matter of fact you would be safe in picking your quarrel without witnesses. All along this young man has been too loud-mouthed. Once you have approached him, he will shout his grievance to the world."

The Killer scowled doubtfully. A general election was impending, and of late he had been troubled by certain misgivings. A week before, the sheriff had warned him that he was getting on the general nerves.

"Then you think that, if necessary, I would be safe to the extent of a small wound?" he hesitated.

"Absolutely," declared the judge. "Only you must be careful with your aim. Should you shoot a little wide and make a clean job of it, we might have our hands full. I would not advise anything of that sort just at present."

The Killer nodded and hitched forward earnestly in his chair. Having been assured of the first phase of his safety, he now entered upon the second and more important one.

"This stranger?" he began. "He is as they say, a kid?"

"That is it," the judge replied. "A mere kid."

"His ability to defend himself? You know anything along this line?"

"Having anticipated the results of his interference, I am fully informed. Of the use of firearms he is wholly ignorant. I doubt that he has handled a pistol a half-dozen times."

"I would be safe in taking my time with him?"

"Entirely so. You could even allow him a shot without any danger."

"His courage? He is liable to run after my challenge?"

"I can not say. It is impossible to predict what a fool with a mission will do. However, you are safe in any event."

"Where is he to be found?"

"At the Black Prince coffee-house. You will know him by his dress, especially the hat. There is not another like it in the parish. Although a felt one like your own, it bears a wide band of a peculiar crimson. This, so I am informed, is the badge of his college."

There fell a silence during which the Killer racked his brain for any unforeseen contingencies. Finding none he rose to depart.

"*Bien*," said he. "I will go ahead then, leaving Pesson to you. As for the price, I ought to receive at least a hundred."

Judge Bebon nodded absently. Having decided, in view of Monsieur Pesson's delicate position, to charge the manager a cool thousand, he took scant interest in this particular item. However, he meant to deal fairly with his client. He would pay him his full hundred, minus the usual fee.

Accordingly the Killer rode off in that calm and contented frame of mind which is born of an easy job with good money at the end. As he trotted along he lazily considered such minor details as were yet unarranged. He would ride in to the Black Prince that afternoon and force a quarrel on the Kid. If the Kid took fright and ran, it would be the better for all concerned. If not, the next day would witness a little shooting.

To the extent of this shooting the Killer gave not so much as a thought. In such cases he invariably took his man high up in the right shoulder.

VI



THE Kid had just finished informing certain sympathizers that the Belvue folk would be lucky if the legislature did not close them up entirely, when the Killer arrived. As it lacked but a short while to sunset, the bar of the Black Prince was well filled. Indeed, to a careful observer, the crowd would have appeared slightly larger than usual. Ever since noon

a vague succession of rumors had drifted into the town.

Like a true emissary of death, the Killer entered quietly and unobtrusively. Going directly to the bar he ordered a drink and, facing about, surveyed the room. Swiftly his eyes swept those who stood or sat about until finally they were arrested by a bright flash of color. Judge Bebon had specified a crimson band upon a felt hat. Amid a tense, expectant silence the Killer drained his glass and moved out from the bar.

It happened that, at the moment, the Kid was all unconsciously rolling a cigarette. Also he sat at ease, with his legs thrust out comfortably before him. As he approached, the Killer caught sight of these out-thrust legs and acted accordingly.

One moment he was apparently slouching his way to the street. The next he had tripped and fallen heavily on all fours. In a flash the Kid was on his feet uttering an apology.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed. "I had no idea that I was sprawled all over the place. You see——"

He broke off as the Killer confronted him, sneering and malignant, as venomous as a newly trodden moccasin.

"Oh, if that's the way you feel about it——" he began.

The Killer interrupted with a gesture of indescribable insolence. When he spoke it was in a slow, measured voice that reached to the farthest corners of the room.

"Pardon, m'sieu," said he. "Having been thrown upon my face in the dirt before every one, it is only natural that I should feel offended. Also it is equally as natural for me to desire complete satisfaction. However, as you are young and a stranger, it is but fair that I allow you a certain time in which to make your arrangements. At this hour tomorrow I shall be here in search of you. Also I will shoot at sight. You would do well to be prepared."

Having spoken, the Killer swung upon his heel. An instant later he had disappeared amid the close-packed circle of those who stood about. It could almost be said of him that he vanished into thin air.

Then the bewildered Kid regained his scattered wits and plunged through the crowd in mad pursuit. Despite his youth he was well developed, and he was also possessed of a most enviable athletic record in the East. Had he caught up with his

challenger, it is probable that further hostilities would have been postponed indefinitely. As it was the dust of the Killer's pony had already settled earthward when he reached the street.

Thus the Kid was forced to return inside, where Jean Gilbeau, the proprietor, promptly fastened upon him and carried him off to his room.

VII

 JEAN GILBEAU, unlike his fellow townsmen, was possessed of a certain compassion for strangers. To begin with he more or less catered to a transient trade. Then again the Kid had been an especially good customer.

Accordingly, once he had reduced his guest to a state of reason, Jean Gilbeau proceeded quite calmly and pleasantly to state the true facts of the case. When he had finished the Kid first flared out in renewed anger and then relapsed into a sullen bitterness born of the treachery of his followers.

"That's what gets me," he complained. "It's bad enough to be assassinated, but when the people you're being assassinated for sit by and watch without even a hint of warning, it's——"

He broke off, words failing him.

Jean Gilbeau smiled amiably.

"I would not worry about that part of it, m'sieu," he advised. "They are like children, my people. They think only of being amused. The main question is: What do you intend doing?"

"I intend to go to the sheriff and have Denbo put under a peace bond," answered the Kid promptly.

Jean Gilbeau shook his head.

"That is no good," he explained. "The sheriff would only tell you that it was a personal affair."

"But the law?"

"That is the law, or rather the politics. In a way Denbo is important politically. Having served those in office, he is in a position to know a great deal about their affairs. No, m'sieu, but two courses are left open to you: You must fight, or you must run. Which is it to be?"

"Why, I'll fight, of course."

"You have learned to shoot, then?"

"No, I couldn't sit here and hit that wall. After I've taken Denbo's gun away, though, I'll guarantee to lick him in one minute by the slowest watch in town."

Jean Gilbeau sighed patiently.

"Come, m'sieu," he exhorted. "This is mere talk. You do not understand. There will be few preliminaries to this affair. Denbo will ride in tomorrow and will call on you to defend yourself. After that he will start shooting. You will not have a chance to double your fists, much less use them."

The Kid went a little white as he considered this.

"Then you mean that he'll kill me unarmed and without a word on my part?"

"Your being unarmed, after his warning, is your own affair. As for his killing you, I doubt that he will go beyond a slight wound. He only wishes to scare you off. However, there is always the chance that he will shoot too wide."

"And if I run?"

"That will end it. His desire accomplished, Denbo would have no object in following you."

As the Kid arrived at his decision his jaw acquired a pronounced outward thrust. He was recalling certain ancestral battle trophies that dated clear back to the Revolutionary War.

"Just the same I'll stay," he announced. "The Merediths are not the running sort."

Jean Gilbeau performed a gesture suggestive of the washing of one's hands.

"*Bien*, m'sieu," said he. "I admire your courage, which is more than I can say of your good sense. For the rest, my last word to you is this: Do not attempt to knock Denbo's head off. In that event you will most certainly be killed."

That night the Kid slept little, although, as yet, he was untroubled by any definite fear of the approaching encounter. Rather he was exasperated by his utter helplessness. Could he get his hands on Denbo, he knew that the struggle would be short-lived. However, he also knew that even a crack track man must give way to the speed of a pistol bullet.

Yet he held grimly to his resolve to stick it out. Perhaps something would turn up at the last moment. If not, he would have preserved his honor at the cost of a slight wound.

Next morning the Kid observed a change in the manner of those who patronized the bar of the Black Prince. To the quaint courtesy of former days was now added a vague something that suggested silent sympathy. All spoke gravely and with lowered

voices. A few even went to the extent of a dumb but encouraging pat upon the shoulder. Gradually the Kid was made uncomfortably aware of the fact that he was a man set apart.

After dinner, unable longer to stand the oppressive air of the bar, he ordered his horse and set out for the country. He decided that he would keep to himself until the appointed time. The seclusion would steady his nerves, and anything was better than the mock sympathy of his treacherous followers.

Be it said to his credit that the Kid managed to amble along the country roads throughout the best part of the afternoon. In fact, when he drew up before the Black Prince once more, a scant fifty minutes separated him from the fateful hour.

Before dismounting he cast a final look around. The little town drowsed lazily in the waning sunlight. It seemed impossible to connect its air of peace with any thoughts of violence or sudden death.

Sighing, the Kid kicked loose a stirrup and slid to the ground. Then, before he could turn into the bar, a small procession debouched from a side street and passed up the main thoroughfare before him.

It was only the shabby and belated funeral of a very humble countryman, yet its effect was as immediate as it was complete. Here was death amid that peaceful scene, not the romantic death of fancy, but the stark, grim death of reality—death that you could see and put your hand on.

The Kid only waited long enough to see. As he vaulted back into the saddle, he was considering swiftly that even the slightest wounds are liable to infection. After this he bent all his energies to getting out of St. Pierre in the shortest possible space of time.

As he clattered down the drowsing street his mind was troubled by the one fear that he might meet the Killer upon his way in. Bending low in the saddle, he plied quirt and spur as he had never plied them before.

Shortly after leaving the town he did raise a horseman, inward bound, whereupon he bent still lower and dodged so violently from side to side that his hat sailed off behind him.

The horseman shouted, but the Kid was taking no chances. Dodging, flogging, spurring, he sped bareheaded on, nor did he draw rein until he had reached the sanctuary of a near-by village.

Here, having left instructions for the forwarding of his baggage, he caught the first train for New Orleans and the security of the East.

VIII



HAVING abandoned our Bad Man in the suburbs of New Orleans, we now pick him up again upon the outskirts of St. Pierre. Also we find him staring in mild surprise at the fantastic evolutions of the rapidly disappearing Kid.

"Sho," muttered Waist-high Wilkins. "That gent's sure in some hurry. I'll just wait till the posse drops by."

No posse appearing, the Bad Man presently dismounted and picked up the Kid's hat which had fallen almost beneath his pony's hoofs. It was a fine hat of recent purchase and, upon trying it on, the bad man found that it was a fair fit. Next, by means of a small mirror, which he drew from a vest-pocket, he discovered that the crimson band added a piquant and altogether pleasing touch to his personal appearance. On his journey westward Waist-high Wilkins had happened upon numerous pretty French girls whose dress implied an unqualified approval of bright colors. The thought of this decided him.

"Findin's is keepin's," he observed to his pony and, having thrust his own battered headpiece inside the roll of his slicker, he tilted his new possession to a jaunty angle and continued his journey.

Ten minutes later he breasted the bar of the Black Prince.

It happened that Jean Gilbeau was on duty and, at sight of the newcomer, the proprietor's brows knitted in perplexity. Having been informed of the Kid's flight, he had just finished congratulating himself upon this peaceful ending to a troublesome affair. Now a stranger appeared wearing the Kid's hat.

Jean Gilbeau was sure of the hat. There was no doubting the color and arrangement of its crimson band. Here was a mystery to intrigue a far less inquisitive person than the proprietor of the Black Prince.

As he served his customer, Jean Gilbeau became politely conversational. He spoke of the weather, the condition of the roads; next of more personal affairs. Ere the first drink had been consumed, he had invited confidences and was receiving them.

The arrival of the second drink found the

proprietor in possession of a fair working knowledge of his guest's past, present and possible future. Also of an explanation regarding the hat.

It was at this point that Jean Gilbeau became abruptly thoughtful, glancing from the hat to the clock above his head. Swiftly, yet carefully, he reviewed the situation.

This stranger was a fighting man, a crack shot but lately returned from an exhibition of his marksmanship. By his own action, and solely through reasons of personal gain, he had come into possession of an article of wearing apparel that marked him for impending combat. In less than ten minutes the Killer would arrive and, having singled out his man, would open fire. That, due to the fairly crowded bar, this singling out would be accomplished by means of the hat, was more than probable. Finally, the stranger was of the same general height and build as the Kid.

As for the Killer, he was a nuisance deserving of abatement at any cost. If the stranger could be kept at the bar, with his back to the room, till the Killer arrived . . .

Jean Gilbeau thought no farther. Snatching a bottle and several glasses, he resumed the interrupted conversation.

"Come, you will have one with me, m'sieu," he invited. "Also, in return for our pleasant talk, I will show you a little experiment concerning the gravity of liquids. You see I take first a glass of spirits, then one of water. Between them I place this card. I will now endeavor, without touching them, to exchange the contents of the glasses. But perhaps you have seen this before?"

Waist-high Wilkins leaned interestedly over the bar.

"Not me," he replied. "If you make it, I'll try her myself."

IX



PROMPTLY at the appointed hour the Killer dismounted before the Black Prince. It was his boast that he was always on time.

Having placed his pony directly in the line of his proposed retreat, he crossed the sidewalk and drew up behind the swing doors that gave into the bar. Carefully peering through the crack between the doors, he looked about until, as before, his

eyes caught a bright flash of color. This color topped the bar, and at sight of it the Killer nodded appreciatively.

After all his man was behaving rather decently in thus placing himself in the open. Had he mingled with the crowd the affair might have proven difficult. Assuring himself that his pistol worked easily in its holster, the Killer stepped inside.

At his entrance the talk gasped out amid a rattle of retreating footsteps and overturned chairs. The patrons, diving for the corners of the room, left an unoccupied space that would have accommodated a battery of cannon. The Killer smiled contemptuously as he paused just inside the swing doors, and uttered his challenge.

"Hola, you with the red hat-band," he called. "Prepare to defend yourself."

As he spoke, the Killer reached for his pistol. This was almost too easy, he told himself. He would act so that a jury could not go beyond offering him a vote of patience. He decided to wait until his man had turned and drawn also.

Quite leisurely the Killer raised his weapon, his eyes fastened upon the lone figure at the bar. He saw Jean Gilbeau duck to safety. He heard the proprietor's sharp:

"Quick, m'sieu. He means you."

Then the figure whirled about to the accompaniment of a wholly unexpected flash and report.

Indeed, so unexpected was it that the Killer seemed to lose all interest in his enterprise. Dropping his pistol, he clutched with both hands at a small, dark spot that appeared below his left armpit. Then, swaying slightly, and in perfect silence, he crumpled slowly forward upon his face.

Some said that the Killer never knew what struck him, but this is to be doubted. At all events, those who picked him up declared that his face was stamped with an expression of vast and injured surprise.

X



SOMEWHAT later, after a sorely bewildered sheriff had been assured of the perfect regularity of the affair, Waist-high Wilkins prepared to depart. It was hard to forego the admiration of the rapidly increasing crowd, but experience had taught the Bad Man the advisability of leaving while the leaving was good.

He must push on, he said. There would

be a full moon, and his horse was good for all night.

Having escorted his guest outside, Jean Gilbeau spoke in farewell.

"Again I thank you, m'sieu," said he. "You are a public benefactor. St. Pierre will ever owe you a debt of gratitude."

Swinging himself into the saddle, Waist-high Wilkins once more turned his pony's head toward the west.

"Forget it," he answered. "The debt's on my side. You may not believe me, but it's the first real fun I've had since I left the Panhandle."



STUBBORN STEVE

by BREVARD MAYS CONNOR

Author of "The White Hope's Understudy."

IT ALL came of Steve Bender's inherent stubbornness and a pat of rouge. Stubbornness was bred into the bone of all the Benders and the rouge was purchased by little Mrs. Steve Bender in San Antonio. She carried it home with her on her return to the ranch and her husband promptly dumped it, little round box and stained chamois skin, into the kitchen stove.

Now little Mrs. Steve had a well-defined chin and hair with a ruddy glint in it. Steve thought hers the most adorable chin and hair in existence but he had never appreciated them as indicative of her character. He had not yet replaced the stove-lid when his wife struck him across the face with her open hand.

He fell back against the wall, open-mouthed and white except for the red print of her fingers across his cheek.

"Girl," he said, "what does this mean?"

And little Mrs. Bender with eyes as hard and cold as sapphires told him.

"It means that I'm a grown woman. It means that I'm your wife and not your slave, Steve Bender."

He lifted his hand to that mark upon his cheek and touched it gingerly, as if it hurt him, or as if he could not understand it.

"No woman that puts paint on her face is a decent woman, 'Liza Lou. I hold to that."

"Then your wife isn't a decent woman," she cried hotly. "She has put paint on her face and she's going to do it again. I'm going to write for some more this very night. What are you going to do about it?"

Steve Bender touched that mark on his cheek and his jaw set until it was unmistakably a Bender jaw, stubborn. He said nothing more but turned on his heel and walked from the house.

In the corral he met his leathery-faced old range-boss Shorty Dunn doctoring a lame filly.

"I'm going over into Mexico," he told him. "I've bought three thousand head of the Esquala herd and I thought I'd better see about moving them out before things got any worse down there. Look after things until I get back."

"Sure," said Shorty Dunn. "When do you allow you'll get back?"

"Can't say," replied Steve casually and he saddled his favorite horse and rode away.



IMPASSIVITY was the second chief characteristic of the Benders. The first, as has been said, was stubbornness.

That night Steve Bender crossed the Rio Grande and two days later he arrived without event at the Rancho Esquila headquarters. That is he reached the place where those headquarters had been. All that remained was a heap of ashes, a wrecked windmill and a ring of flame-bitten cottonwoods.

Presently he stumbled upon a small go-down off in the brush that had somehow survived the general devastation. There he found an old blind crone and a very frightened small boy. Reassured by the feel of money in her hand the old woman told him what had happened: Bandits had arrived, there had been a fight and the hacienda had been treated as he could see for himself. The bandits had driven away all cattle but those straying in the mountains and finally she and the boy had buried the proprietors of the Esquila there under the cottonwoods where the ground was soft.

Well up in the mountains Steve Bender found a bowl-shaped valley that suited his purpose. A ring of cliffs and steep shale slopes walled it in completely with the exception of the narrow cañon through which he had entered. This he could close with brush. It was protected from the chill winds whirling down from the peaks so that the grass was good, and there was water and a small herder's hut backed up against a cliff.

It was an inaccessible place where an encounter with any of the several parties that slew and stole in the name of liberty and the state was quite doubtful. Here, because the cattle rightfully belonged to him, and because he was a stubborn man, he began to collect his share of the Esquila herd.

This was a task of many months. What cattle had escaped the raiders were in detached bunches high up in the hills, and moreover they were as wild as the goats that had become their familiars. It was quite an undertaking for a single man and horse.

Spring flashed into Summer, Summer faded reluctantly into Fall. There were a

thousand head in the bowl-shaped valley that had become content with their imprisonment, and in the cabin under the cliff, Steve Bender, if not content, had become inured to days that were all alike and equally lonely. Once a month he rode thirty miles for red beans and coffee and sidemeat and tobacco; for the rest he rounded up what remained of the Esquila herd with a grim persistence.

Now and then he looked toward the north with his gaze focused on some indefinite point beyond the horizon. That was the only evidence, if evidence it can be called, of his thoughts ranging beyond the day and the day's work.

One afternoon in late October he returned with his month's supply of provisions to find his cattle being rounded up by a force of some twenty men under the leadership of one Fidencio Moreles, whose nickname was the "Buzzard." It was said of this Fidencio that he never attacked any but the weakest and never left them until they were plucked clean. Hence his title. When he found that Bender was alone he made formal claim to the cattle in the name of liberty and the state.

In the argument that ensued the Buzzard went down with a bullet in his shoulder. By fast riding Bender gained the shelter of his hut where he barricaded himself and drove the enemy to cover.

The Buzzard had come for cattle and he had the cattle, but the pain in his shoulder maddened him, and he so far forgot his usual discretion as to stay and fight. There was very little lack of discretion, to be sure, in twenty men fighting one, but that one fought exasperatingly well. From a loop-hole low down in the cabin wall he fired methodically whenever so much as a hand's breadth of the persons of his attackers was visible.

When the third night came he had three rounds left in his rifle and six in his revolver, nine shots in all, and all of fifteen able-bodied men still to be dealt with.

As the quick dusk fell the fusillade that had continued for forty-eight hours lulled of a sudden. He was not tricked into any false sense of security. He knew that this pause surely preceded a final rush which would come when it was completely dark.

He lay on his stomach behind the loop-hole and waited.

Presently a shot rang out away across the

valley and after a space of several pulse-beats it was followed by another. Then silence fell again, thick, like a stifling blanket. To Steve those shots could have but one meaning, the signal for attack. He waited, tense.

It was a long wait, a hard wait. Any man, in such a position, might well have been shaken to his core, but Steve Bender was as steady as stone.

Then a whisper cut through the silence. "Steve."

Up to that moment he had seen nothing, heard nothing. He could see nothing now, but it seemed as if he could hear a soft breathing and something that brushed against the other side of the wall.

Again the whisper:

"Steve! Steve Bender!"

He leaped to his feet and kicked away the logs braced against the door. This he swung open a little way. A body lurched in against him and fell at his feet. He closed and braced the door again, threw his saddle-blanket over the loophole and struck a match against his thigh.

"Shorty Dunn!" he cried softly.

And Shorty Dunn it was with his innumerable wrinkles deepened with pain and both hands pressed against his side. Blood was seeping through his fingers. Bender crouched beside him and lifted the old grizzled head in the crook of his arm.

"Trailed you to the Esquala—old woman told me where to look—ran into that bunch across the valley—and got mine——"

"Yes," said Steve gently but urgently, "yes, Shorty, but why did you come?"

"'Liza Lou, she sent me," he heard and the match flame shook in the hand that had been so steady. "She sent me to tell you there was a baby and that she was waitin'——"

There was a long-drawn sibilant breath and the match and the life of Shorty Dunn went out simultaneously.

Slowly Steve got to his feet. In the darkness of the hut he turned instinctively to the north.

"I'm coming, 'Liza Lou," he said. "I'll get there."

With a clumsy reverence he stretched the body against the wall and covered it with the saddle-blanket.

"Thank you, Shorty," he whispered and unbarred the door and stepped out.

Across the valley lights danced and

shouts arose that were flung from cliff to cliff to faint among the peaks. He decided they were searching for Shorty Dunn who more than likely had paid for his bullet in like coin.

He took down his rope from a peg beside the door and ran it through his fingers until he was satisfied with its pliability. Then he adjusted the running noose, and, stepping back, whirled it above his head.

From the edge of the cliff directly above the hut projected the stump of a lightning-shattered ironwood tree that was just visible in the faint twilight of the stars. At this he aimed and threw. The rope fell short. In its fall it swept down a diminutive avalanche of pebbles, the noise of which threatened to betray him.

Undismayed he climbed upon the roof of the hut and from an awkward angle at its edge threw again and again. Repeated failures did not dull his energy, the pebbles falling in a continual stream now did not frighten him. Back and shoulders ached and perspiration broke from every pore but he did not pause.

At last the noose caught and held. Without waiting to catch his breath he started up the rope hand over hand, pressing his knees against the unyielding granite.

When he reached the top and, with a last racking effort, drew himself over the edge, his chest was heaving with gasps that seemed as if they would tear his ribs apart. His palms were raw, his muscles wrenched with pain.

For a moment he lay limp and inert while the stars reeled and the mountains rose and fell like waves in mid-sea.

It was only a moment, however, and then he was on his feet again, his face toward the north.

"I'm coming, 'Liza Lou. I'll get there."

From the tail of his eye he saw a shadow rise behind him. He was not unprepared. It had come to his mind, though it had not deterred him, that the Buzzard might keep a sentry on this cliff. He lurched forward as the starlight glittered on uplifted steel, a burning pain throbbed through his shoulder, but he had caught his assailant's wrist before the knife could fall again while his other hand strangled back the cry that arose in the man's throat.

The knife tinkled to the ground. They grappled and swayed and fell, Bender uppermost with both hands sunk into the

brown throat now, forcing the head back and over the cliff's edge. Something crunched beneath his fingers and the hands that had been tearing madly at his relaxed. He arose and stepped back.

He did not look at the body lying there half-launched into space with its dulling eyes reflecting the stars. He looked to the north.

"I'll get there," he panted.



FOR two days and three nights he toiled onward among the mountains without food and without sleep. He grudged himself the moment lost in drinking at some brook; he would not stop to bind his wound. At night the crisp cold cut into his bones and in the day the sun blazed down in all tropic ferocity.

The third morning he entered a tiny foothill town and was arrested. The *jefe politico*, a paunchy little man, vacillating between fear of possible consequences and pride in his capture, was politely firm before the American's protests.

"If you are a friend of the Government, sir," he said with excessive civility, "then I do you a favor for the hills are no safe place for a man alone; if you are an enemy of the Government—then I only do my duty."

Steve explained that he was an American citizen and held no answerable opinion concerning the Government of Mexico. The little man elevated expressive palms.

"That is not for me to decide, sir. I must hold you until the governor arrives."

"How long will that be?" asked Steve with imperturbable calm.

"A week—a month—*quien sabe?*"

"It is too long," said Steve.

That night he bribed the sentry with his watch and what little money he carried and was allowed to escape. On the outskirts of the village he found an ancient pensioner of a horse, which he commandeered. He twisted a bit of rope around the beast's muzzle as a bridle, mounted bareback and set off toward the north.

The foothills flattened away, and by day-break he was out on a plain that was little better than a desert. It was bare save for hummocks of dry grass through which the wind-driven sand rattled with a sound like that of far-off rifle-fire and for an occasional barrel cactus that stood out upon the plain like a giant sentinel. Ahead loomed the

blue wall of the Burros, the last barrier between him and the river. But between him and the hills stretched thirty desert miles.

When the sun arose the plain became a fiery mirror, giving back heat for heat, glare for glare. The wind that played between was a furnace-draft laden with particles of sand as stinging-hot as sparks from an anvil. He moved forward waist-deep in a sea of shimmering heat. His lips cracked, his eyes grew red-rimmed and the fine alkali dust settled into the lines of his face, exaggerating them until he looked old.

The sun had scarcely touched the zenith when his steed lurched forward with a weary grunt and lay still.

Steve stepped over the carcass and continued on his way without so much as a glance. He advanced steadily while the sun sank into the west behind the mountains and the stars popped out in quick succession like lamps along a city street. The moon, following close on the heels of the stars saw him stumble and fall forward on his face in the sand. He had fallen asleep on his feet, even while walking.

It was day when he awoke, but not the same fierce inferno of sun and heat as before. An unbroken gray cloud sheeted the sky and the air was singularly heavy and lifeless, neither hot nor cold. There was not the slightest breeze. Earth and sky seemed to hold their breath, as if listening, expectant.

Steve looked to the north. The base of the hills was hidden in a swirling gray fog that mounted higher and higher and swept nearer and nearer with the rapidity of a prairie fire. But he knew it was neither fog nor fire.

"Blizzard," he muttered tonelessly and took up his march again. Man had tried his force against him, and now Nature, the all-powerful, would try hers.

"I'm coming, 'Liza Lou," he said his eyes on the dust cloud. "I'll get there."

A feeble boast it seemed in the face of the elemental fury that broke upon him. With a shriek the dust-laden wind pounced upon him, staggered him. In one eye-wink it turned cold, as cold as the heart of some Arctic cave.

He could no longer see or hear but there was no need for that. He was going north and the wind was from the north. It was only necessary to bore into the wind.

Steadily he advanced, head down, eyes closed tight, a thing numbed and buffeted into insensibility of everything but the one great purpose—to get on.

He walked with a strangely mechanical motion of thigh and knees, stiffly, like an automaton, clutched by the fingers of the gale, flayed by the lashing sand, his joints manacled with cold.

Meanwhile his torpid faculties were busy with a disturbing doubt. He had been about ten miles from the Burros when the blizzard struck him. How near was he now? Was he making appreciable progress? Was he making any progress at all?

He had an uncanny feeling that he was lifting his feet only to put them down again where they had rested before. He felt ludicrously like a soldier marking time. And he realized that every step he took brought him nearer to the end of his strength.

How long could he hold out?

And then above the shriek of the wind sounded the shrill nicker of a horse. He halted and for the first time in many days smiled. He whistled and a shadow loomed through the dust. It was an iron-gray pony with a bit of rope trailing from its neck. It halted and watched his approach with ears pricked forward and nostrils quivering.

"Whoa, boy," he cajoled and reached for the rope.

The horse snorted, reared and wheeled. In a moment it was lost to sight and hearing. Steve turned again into the wind, doggedly, stubbornly.

But soon there was a soft whinny on his right. He turned to find the horse standing as before, alarmed and yet curious, plainly desirous of human company and yet fearful of it.

Steve approached and the horse fled, only to halt and flee again just before the man came within reach. Twice he clutched at the rope but his fingers were too numb to hold it. The chase was comic in its cruelty but if the man realized that he played the clown in this comedy he gave no sign. He was a Bender and stubborn.

At last he lay down at full-length on the ground, not from weakness but cunning. The horse snorted and fled, nickered and returned. Around the prone figure it wheeled in a gradually narrowing circle sniffing, dancing, dashing away and returning. Steve did not stir.

Then hot breath puffed against his hand and something writhed snake-like across it. It was the rope. He clutched it and held fast as the horse reared back. For a long time he did not move, but talked to the horse soothingly, then very slowly, movement by movement he got to his feet.

The horse was still, but all tensed for flight at the first awkward step. It winced under the man's touch but stood. The next moment Steve was astride with his hands wrapped in the flowing mane and his knees pressed tight into the horse's sides. Without urging his mount broke into a thundering gallop and without guidance it headed into the wind, north.

The cold stabbed Steve through and through now that his muscles were inactive. Languor spread in comforting waves over him, realities became dreams. . . .



AT FIRST he thought the bed on which he lay was a dream, and the room about him and the roof from which strings of drying chilli peppers hung, but the woman who leaned above him was no dream but a most material reality, big-bosomed and broad-hipped and with a wen upon her cheek.

"You are awake then?" she said in Spanish, her brown face alight with good feeling. Steve's answer was—

"How long have I been asleep?"

"Since yesterday—eh-eh! You are a sick man; you must not get up."

But he brushed her restraining arms and protests aside.

"I must go," he said bluntly but not unkindly.

The old woman sighed heavily.

"I had hoped you would stay and let me make you well again. What are the old good for but that? I am old and lonely and you are just so old as my son would be who was killed at Lerdo. But if you must go——"

She shrugged her heavy shoulders.

She went out so that he could dress, shutting the little cabin door behind her, and, when dressed, he followed to find her waiting with the gray pony, saddled and bridled now.

"Go as you came," she said, "and do not thank me. It is I who am in your debt for you brought back this pony who had run away. You can leave him at the ferry and friends there will return him."

"Thanks," he said, unable to voice rightly his gratitude. Suddenly he bent and kissed the old brown cheek. "Thanks," he said again and rode away to the north.

Mid-afternoon saw him upon the south bank of the Rio Grande looking across a mile of yellow swirling waters, speckled with tree-trunks and driftage and all the litter of a stream at full flood.

"Why," he said aloud in stupid wonder, "why, the old river is on a rise."

Of the ferry there was no sign, nor of houses up and down the bank as far as he could see. Thirty miles above he knew there was a bridge but that was west and he was going north. And north he went, straight into the booming current.

The gray after a brief reluctance breasted it bravely and Steve slipped from the saddle and swam alongside. Down and down the current carried them but steadily though almost imperceptibly horse and man gained toward the further shore.

Steve's eyes were riveted on that far bank.

"I'll get there," he said.

Dusk was falling as he rode up the south trail. As he topped the coulée bank and looked down upon his home he drew rein for a moment and listened. From the corral came the noise of laughter and song as the boys fed down.

With a deep trembling sigh of relief he spurred on. What more reassuring "all's well" cry can greet the returning wayfarer than laughter or a song?

There was no light in his house as he approached, but as he mounted the stairs a match flared up followed by the mellow broadening of lamplight. He had to steady himself against the knob before he could open the door.

He was very weak now who had been so strong.

"Who's that?" asked a listless voice.

He stepped across the hall into the lighted living-room. Over the lamp he saw the white face of his wife grow whiter, her eyes widen, her hands flutter to her breast and then reach out to him.

"Steve!"

His face twitched beyond his control, but he managed to steady his voice into sternness.

"Are you still bent on using that——"

But he never finished. The force which had driven him northward over hill and desert, through storm and stream encountered the legendary stubbornness of the Benders and annihilated it for all time.

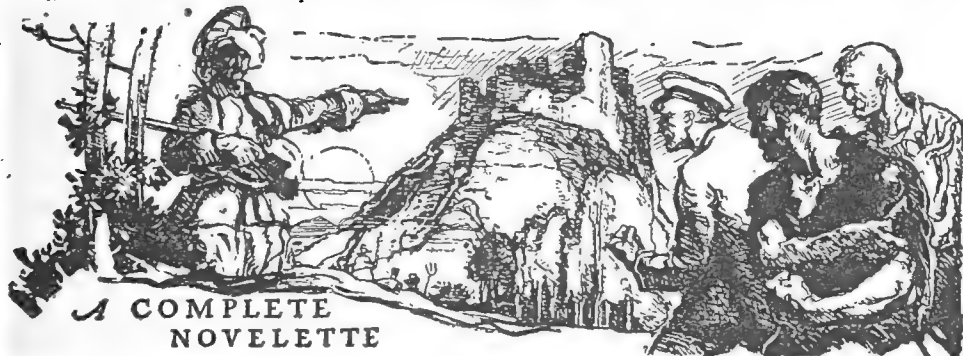
He held out his one sound arm for her.

"I'm home, honey, I got here," he sobbed openly and unashamed.

He was only twenty-two years old.



PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY



by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "The Sinews of War," "The Heels of Chance," etc.

OF COURSE, the question is for you to decide, personally, Captain McConaughy," said the Intelligence Officer. "You are not under our orders any longer. The service is quite optional with you."

"I ha' been out from home an unconscionable length o' time," returned Miles McConaughy, without removing his eyes from the vista of Alexandria's shipping seen through the office window. "There's ma ownerrrs—"

"I wired the Red Funnel Line yesterday," the Intelligence Officer interrupted. "Here's their cable."

He tossed the slip across the desk. McConaughy smoothed it out with painstaking thoroughness, knitted his heavy brows and pored over the contents earnestly. At the conclusion he emitted a dry chuckle. The Intelligence Officer grinned slightly.

"You find it amusing?"

"Aye."

"T. McNish seems to think you've run into as much danger as you ought to," commented the Intelligence Officer. "You stand well with your owners."

"Moderrately," conceded McConaughy. "She's a braw bit leddie, the Managin' Dirrrector."

"A lady?"

"Aye."

"Who? T. McNish?"

"Just so."

The Intelligence Officer laughed.

"Who would have supposed the Managing Director of the Red Funnel Line to be a woman? Well, that explains what I didn't understand about the cable, captain. Only a woman could have written it."

McConaughy regarded him with suspicion.

"I ttrrust ye ha' no intention o' disrespect in your rremarrks," he said. "Miss McNish is an extraorrdinarr' good friend to me. I'd be——"

"No, no," asserted the Intelligence Officer hastily. "You quite mistake me, captain. I was referring merely to the unmistakable feminine attitude assumed by the writer of the cable."

"Feminine is it?"

McConaughy's voice still showed traces of resentment.

"Read it for yourself."

"Aye? 'Tis no grreat composeetion. Have no objections further employment O. H. M.'s service Captain McConaughy and crew, but wish the choice to be put up to Captain McConaughy. Urgently advise him not to risk lives of himself and his men in any further dangerous enterprises. T. McNish. What would ye call feminine in that?"

"Why, man, who but a woman would have shifted from under the burden of making the decision in that way? And who but a woman would have left the decision to

you and in the same breath advised your judgment on it?"

"H'm," McCaughy pondered the matter a full minute. "Ye ha' a sharrp comprehension," he admitted finally. "I'll say that for ye. Ye'll not be English?"

"My name's McDonald," returned the officer amusedly.

"That explains it." McCaughy nodded his head solemnly. "Yes, ye'll be too perrceptionable by far for an Englishman. If ye're in perristent contact wi' the breed it must be a sore trial to ye."

"Now and then, captain, now and then. But we must get back to this matter of your decision."

McCaughy studied the cablegram again.

"If it's no verry dangerous I can go," he said. "She'll ha' no objection to such, I tak' it."

"Well, it's not a lightening job in Belfast Lough," replied the Intelligence Officer. "But neither is it a case of charging the whole Turkish Army. For a man of your record, I should call it rather a holiday task."

"Gun-rrunnin' is an old story," observed McCaughy contemptuously. "But gun-rrunnin' for the English Government—Hecht! There's a spice to the idea, I'll no deny!"

"Here's the whole proposition briefly," continued the Intelligence Officer. "This man who calls himself Dikran Kalekian, and who has credentials as agent of the Hunchakis—"

"What's that?"

"It's an Armenian secret society—political. This man Kalekian brings information that there are some thousands of his countrymen driven into the higher valleys of the Taurus range along the coast of the Gulf of Adalia, who are anxious to make trouble for the Turks, but lack the arms and ammunition. He claims that if he had the weapons he could seize the whole coast from Adalia to Smyrna. Now, we have plenty of arms and not as many men as we should like. The chance looks good to us. By landing a shipload of rifles and cartridges we may be able to stir up so much trouble in the Mediterranean vilayets that it will divert troops from the Dardanelles and perhaps even make it worth while for us to land another expedition at Smyrna."

"Firrst, I'm thinkin', ye'd better mak'

due prrovision for the poor loons ye ha' left at Gallipoli," remarked McCaughy.

The Intelligence Officer looked uncomfortable.

"Of course, my military position forbids my discussing—" he began.

"Ye show grrreat wisdom in that attitude," McCaughy admonished him grimly. "Say as little as ye can—for there'll be — little to say when we come to the long end o' it."

"But you see the advantage of this Armenian plan?" asked the Intelligence Officer after an uncomfortable silence.

"Humph! I see where it might prrofit the English. I'm none so sure o' the Armenians—whoever they may be."

"Oh, they're a sort of primitive Christians," replied the Intelligence Officer carelessly. "Been livin' in that part of the world ever sinse Adam and Eve sinned. They were pretty near the first Christians, judging from what Kalekian says. He'll talk you blind on the subject."

"Primitive Christians, ye say?" There was new interest in McCaughy's tones. "They still do be Christians?"

"Oh, yes. That's their trouble. Whenever the Turks haven't any other iniquity on their hands, they have a massacre of Armenians. The Turks have been gettin' back at us in that way for some weeks past. They've cleaned out the Armenians in some districts, and in others the Armenians have fled to the mountains. Our warships pick 'em up occasionally in small parties, cut and shot to pieces, generally, and starvin'."

"Hecht!" growled McCaughy. "That's harrd hearrin' for Christian ears."

"It's not pleasant."

"And they're still arrdent in the faith?"

"Well, I'm not a theologian, so I can't give you expert testimony," rejoined the Intelligence Officer with frank amusement. "But from all I hear—yes. They claim that they are the only true, original Christians, and their creed is different from ours."

"They're no Papists?" asked McCaughy in sudden alarm.

"Oh, no. They have nothing to do with the Roman Catholics."

"That's well," said McCaughy. "Ye'll meet consorrtable Papists once or twice a voyage—there's a friend o' mine by the name o' Cashin, a man he is as well as a priest—but they're no my idea o' satisfactory Christians."

The Intelligence Officer uncrossed his legs, lit a cigaret and shuffled his papers.

"We seem to be wandering from the original subject again," he remarked. "How about it, captain? Will you take charge of this little legal gun-running expedition? There'll be good fat pay for all hands, and no danger that I can see. You land your cargo at a certain point in the Gulf of Adalia—Kalekian attends to that. You get a receipt for the goods, and that's all. Well?"

McConaughy considered.

"I'll ha' convarrse first wi' this Armenian ye speak of. Is he here?"

"In the next room, I believe. Half a sec'."



THE officer vanished, to return a moment later with a tall dignified man, intellectual in visage, lighter than a Spaniard in color, and clothed with conventional correctness in a frock coat and striped trousers.

"This is Dikran Kalekian," said the Intelligence Officer. "Mr. Kalekian, Captain McConaughy, whom we hope to persuade to take care of your business for you."

The Armenian bowed profoundly, with a flash of white teeth through his curly black beard.

"It is a pleasure to make the acquaintance of a man so brave and so well known as Captain McConaughy," he said with a very slight accent tingeing his well-chosen English. "I am sure there is nobody who could do better for us what we wish."

McConaughy stared uncomfortably. The Intelligence Officer choked an unborn chuckle and said:

"I'll leave you two together to talk this over. Let me know if you want anything."

As he left, McConaughy had the feeling of a man whose inner self is being probed by an alien intelligence.

"Ye—ye'll be a Christian, I hear," he stumbled at last.

"Christian? Oh, yes." The Armenian smiled—he seemed continually smiling; when his smile was accentuated it was simply broader. "My people always have been Christian. You will forgive me if I say it, but when your people were painted savages in their northern woods, my people were worshipers of the True Religion. We had reared stately churches in our great cities, and we were many and prosperous under our princes and kings."

"Humph," said McConaughy. "I don't hold wi' princes an' kings—nor prrecisely wi' grrreat churrrches, either. I'm o' the belief a wood chapel does as well for the draw-in' o' the spirrit into interrccourse wi' Divinity."

"So it is with us, now," agreed the Armenian. "For many centuries we have been forced to worship in stables and caves, fortunate beyond words when we had a hut we might call a church."

"Do ye tell me so? That's cruel harrrd."

"For our faith to our creed we have paid yearly taxes in blood," continued Dikran Kalekian. "We have never known when the hand of the oppressor would descend upon us. And because we have always been shut off from intercourse with the great free Christian nations, we have never had arms, and so our only protection has been flight. But through all this we have kept the faith." He drew himself up proudly, and a light, half-proud, half-satirical, gleamed in his eyes. "We are the primitive Christians, the holders of the Belief as it was first transmitted."

McConaughy was awestruck, breathing fast.

"It's ma conviction ye ha' a just grrrievance against they Turrrk hell-hounds," he rasped. "An' ye do not hold wi' the Pappists, they tell me?"

"With Rome?" The Armenian snarled with rage. "We detest her. Aye, even as do you Protestants, although you have taken your creed from hands many times removed from the source."

"Touchin' that point I ha' a disposeection to arrgue wi' ye at some convenient time," returned McConaughy firmly. "But o' the injustice that has been done ye I ha' no doubts. I'm a Christian man, an' I thank God I ha' a Christian crew. I wouldna carry any other. For Christians in distress I ha' the feelin' o' kindred the Good Book enjoins upon us a'—aye, though it might choke me in the gizzard, I'd save the Pope o' Rome, himself, from Turrrks. So there's ma hand on it. Ye shall ha' your arms if Miles McConaughy's skill means anything."

A sinister light flared in the brilliant eyes of the Armenian as he gripped the Ulsterman's hand, but it was drowned instantly in the suave smile which curled his red lips.

"Sir, you have a magnificent Christian heart," he said impressively. "You have a heart, if I may say so, like the hearts of the

first Apostles, who transmitted Primitive Christianity to us, who have transmitted its light through the ages. I shall look forward, Captain McConaughy, to many pleasant discourses with you."

"Do so," replied McConaughy heartily. "An' ye'll find pleasant fellows for discourse o' religion in Jock Grant, ma Firrst Officer, an' Evan Apgar—he's ma Chief Engineer. Jock's a Scotch Presbyterian, the same as me, wi' some thriflin' modifications touchin' on predestination an' one or two bit points we ha' never cleared up. Evan's Welsh, an' man, he's ggrand when he has the inspired fit come on him for to testify!"

II



"SHE'S no a verra sonsy craft," observed Jock Grant, as their launch threaded its way through Alexandria's port traffic toward the tarnished hull of the one-time Turkish coasting-steamer *Chambyses*.

Neither McConaughy nor Apgar answered him, but both silently registered entire affirmation. They had passed a number of slatternly vessels in their progress from the quay, but none was so down-at-heel, battered and dilapidated as the *Chambyses*, riding to a rusty length of cable some two hundred yards on their port quarter. She was a small boat—about 1,000 tons, according to the Intelligence Officer, who advanced the information cheerfully—with one funnel that looked to be about to tumble down; two bare pole masts; a hull that was slowly scaling away, and upperworks that had not known a paint-brush since they left the Greek shipyard where she was built.

"Not exactly an attractive craft, I'll admit," agreed the Intelligence Officer, "but she's just what is needed for your purposes. Inconspicuous—"

"Man," said McConaughy, "would ye call a leper inconspicuous?"

"Well, no, perhaps — But, seriously, Captain McConaughy, she may look bad from here, but we've cleaned her up thoroughly inside. She's been fumigated for rats, and the Health Officer told me they burned several tons of cockroaches."

"She'd need all o' that," replied McConaughy. "What was she in the days o' her shame?"

"She was on a run out of Smyrna up and down the coast—pilgrims, European cabin-

passengers, native deck-passengers, live-stock, dates, wine and vermin. We picked her up off Smyrna some months ago, and she's been lying here ever since. We don't care what you do to her."

"Hecht," said McConaughy. "There's suspection in ma mind if the English grow generous. I tak' it she's not what would be called seaworrrthy."

"I'm no seaman," the Intelligence Officer hastened to affirm.

They slid alongside the dingy flank of the *Chambyses* before McConaughy could make answer, and he and Jock Grant followed the Intelligence Officer up the ladder which the Egyptian caretaker had lowered for them. Evan Apgar, who had maintained silence throughout the trip from shore, followed last, with a look of settled gloom on his face. The others turned at once to the bridge, but Apgar dove down a flight of steep ladders under a grated hatchway that led to the engine-room.

Mr. Apgar's motto in life was "know your engines." When he went aboard a new craft, he always sought out first the engine-room and endeavored to work up some form of admiration for that which was to be under his care. Invariably, he regarded his new charges with loathing, which shifted gradually to some form or other of respect, according to the efficiency they manifested. But it was impossible for him to withhold for long his affection for any piece of machinery, no matter how cranky and troublesome it might be.

McConaughy and Jock Grant were not surprised, therefore, when Evan appeared to them on the bridge a quarter of an hour later and announced calmly—

"It caan't pe tit."

The Intelligence Officer looked at him in amazement, but McConaughy simply said—

"Are they very bad, Evan?"

"Fery paat is mild langwidge," retorted Apgar. "T'ere is mild piston-rot t'at is not so cofered wi' shale, I wonter can it run true. Eferyt'ing is rust. Whoefor cleaned ship, he paintet t'e walls, he paintet t'e decks, an' he spat on t'e engines."

"What speed would ye give her?" asked McConaughy.

"If ye put on t'e steam now, she gifes six, sefen refolutions a minit—an' she plows herself to —!"

Evan was by way of being an Evangelist,

but he believed in faithful delineation of the truth.

McConaughy looked speculatively out to sea.

"The carrgo is all stowed?" he remarked to the Intelligence Officer, who stood anxiously by.

"Yes, I'll show you——"

"Never mind that." McConaughy swung around to Apgar. "Ye've got three days to clean up in, Evan," he said curtly. "Bring the men out this afternoon and turn to. Ye've handled worse nor this rat-trap in your time."

"Aye," said Evan obediently. "'Twill taak' a wealth o' paint an' oils."

McConaughy clapped him on the shoulder.

"Ye're in Gov'ment employ, man," he admonished. "Think o' the joys ahead o' ye. All ye need do is the signin' o' the indents."

Apgar scuttled out of sight with a grin of pleased anticipation on his face. In his philosophy the next best thing to a beautifully, spotlessly clean set of engines was a set of engines that required his utmost skillful exertions to make them workable. Success, in such a contingency, naturally was a tribute to his personal ability. So in the next two days he built up a wonderful love for the *Chambyses'* decrepit old engines. He and his assistants debated ardently what emergency measures should be taken with the boiler-tubes, which apparently suffered from some metallic form of tuberculosis.

"We caan to nought put keep a low heaat o' steam an' pray," said Evan at last.

It was marvelous what a low head of steam and praying did accomplish—all of six knots an hour.

But no such perfunctory makeshifts were practicable in the case of the tail-shaft, which wellnigh broke Evan's heart. He raved and he cursed and he swore, and ended up by withdrawing to his cabin for an hour's meditation and prayer. When he reappeared he was still pessimistic, but grimly determined to achieve some improvement.

"Craacket?" he replied to McConaughy's inquiries. "Why t'e screw does not faall into t'e waater, I caan not unterstant, whateffer."

He went ashore and purchased sundry requisites at heedless prices—in his abstraction even foregoing the pleasure of bargain-

ing with his kind, and upon his return took two of his more trusted subordinates and descended to the nethermost, stinking inwards of the *Chambyses*, where they labored the rest of that day and most of the ensuing night, crouched and huddled in bilge and floods of oil, welding a ring about the most reprehensible section of the tail-shaft.

"Py efery right, she shoul't be trawn," asserted Evan, after he had crawled forth, filthy but happy, and imbibed cups of tea amid the congratulations of the entire crew; "put she will holt wi' aplenty lupricants. Naame o' John Wesley, woot a wreck o' gootly iron she to pe!"

In the meantime, McConaughy and Jock Grant had been busied with the other preparations for the expedition, involving the substantial overhauling of the navigating gear, shipping of supplies and certain internal arrangements.

The living quarters of the ship were clean and the holds had been scoured and painted prior to the shipping of the cargo, which occupied comparatively small space; but there were many minor details to be attended to. The three days McConaughy had stipulated were up by the time they had done what was absolutely necessary.

"Are you satisfied she'll keep afloat?" asked the Intelligence Officer when he came aboard the next morning, in company with Dikran Kalekian and another Armenian, to see them off.

"'Twill be no fault o' our's if she decays on our hands," returned McConaughy grimly. "An' ye had the face to tell me 'twas easy money we'd be earnin' by the voyage! Hecht, ye'll go far wi' the English!"

"Hope so," returned the Intelligence Officer, with a grin. "It's hard enough for a poor Scotsman, eh, Mr. Grant?"

"Ye say truth," Jock corroborated soberly. "I mind——"

"Never mind what ye mind," interrupted McConaughy brusquely. "What for ha' we got two o' these primitive Christians wi' us? That wasna ma underrstandin'."

"Oh, the other bird? He's a servant or something like that to Dikran. Our friend is quite a person in his own country, Captain McConaughy."

"An' am I supposed to be takin' ma orr-derrs from him?"

There was belligerency in McConaughy's tones.

"Not at all, not at all. Your relations with him must necessarily be delicate, Captain, and I am instructed to advise you to employ great tact. He is with you in an advisory capacity, as guide and mentor. He knows intimately the coast you will visit; he has made the plans for the landing of the arms. You had best consult with him in everything affecting the object of the expedition. But on the ship, of course, you are master. Here are your official papers. They will identify you with any of our patrols you may encounter."

"Humph." McCaughy stowed the documents in an inside pocket, after a cursory survey of them. "Ha' ye orrder for me?"

"Only these: you are to sail at once, making your course for Morphou Bay on the northeast coast of Cyprus. What speed can you get out of this junk-heap?"

"Six knots, accorrdin' to ma chief."

"Well, it's three hundred miles from here to Morphou Bay—a good two days' run. Say you get there day after tomorrow in the evening. You'll lie off whilst Dikran or his servant goes ashore for information. Your next move will be governed by what they learn. If everything is all right you will proceed at once for a point on the Gulf of Adalia, about midway of a barren stretch of one hundred miles between Adalia, at the head of the Gulf, and Alaya on its eastern coast. That's where the arms are to be landed."

"An' what sorr't o' a coast might this be?"

"Rocky, I understand. Pretty bad. But you needn't worry. Dikran's servant knows it all, and he will pilot you."

McCaughy cast a glance of ill-favor toward the two Armenians who waited in the opposite gangway.

"Ye're puttin' me fair into the hands o' they loons," he growled. "An' Christians or no Christians, they do be natives. I'm none so engaged wi' the prroject."

"Nonsense, man," returned the Intelligence Officer. "Remember, there's more in it for them than there is for you. They have every incentive to get you safe to port. Good luck. I'll see you this day next week if all goes well."

McCaughy shook hands without enthusiasm, and turned to his passengers.

"We're ready if ye are," he said.

"But certainly," responded Kalekian. "At once, Captain McCaughy. This is

my servant and friend, George Kostikian. He belongs to the ancient guild of the mariners, as yourself. Upon him you may rely to guide you safely through unknown waters."

George Kostikian was a dark, sour-looking, bearded man with evil, slant eyes, and none of the urbanity of manner that characterized his master. He grumbled a greeting to McCaughy in some strange tongue and then resumed his study of the surroundings.

"George speaks only the speech of the Haiasdan," continued Kalekian. "I will interpret if you wish to ask him anything."

"What is Haiasdan?" asked McCaughy curiously.

"That is what we Armenians call ourselves. Armenia is a name invented by the old Greeks. It is not in our speech. We call our land Haik, and we are the Haiasdan."

"Ye're a strange race," rumbled McCaughy.

"We are," assented the Armenian, with an odd, fleeting look that McCaughy missed.

"And now," McCaughy went on, "if ye would see your cabin——"

"Gladly."

"Yon steward will attend ye. I must get the ship under way. Ma friiendly advice to ye is that ye prrocare life-presarrvers before ye do aught else."

Alarm appeared in Kalekian's face.

"The ship, she is not safe? But what a foolishness to sail——"

"Oh, I'm not altogether in earnest," answered McCaughy contemptuously.

"She's a rotten old tub, but we'll get along if it doesna blow up a storm. Mak' yourself easy."

But the Armenian was not satisfied, and when he reappeared on deck five minutes later, the crew of the *Chambyes* noted with soundless mirth that he brought a life-belt, which he carefully deposited behind the door of the miniature saloon that was perched midway of the old coaster's deck.

The anchor was already hoisted inboard, and Apgar's reinforced screw-shaft was turning gingerly, the flaking rust from the propeller-blades dyeing the foam of the wake, as they forged slowly out to sea. Below, the engines groaned and clanked, whilst Evan and his stunted Welsh oilers and stokers doggedly fought the speed

upward, first to four knots, then to five, and with a burst of triumph to a precarious six. As they passed the last sandy headland, the first swell of the Mediterranean broke over the bows and staggered the *Chambyses*; but she rose buoyantly to it after a moment's hesitation, and refused to be cowed by still heavier seas.

"She'll ha' a hearrrt in her," McConaughy admitted to Jock Grant, who stood by him on the bridge.

"Aye," said Grant. "The lassie kens a knowin' touch. It maun please her tae hae real sailorsmen admeenisterin' her wants."

"Ye're a poet, man," cried McConaughy. "Go below wi' Chips an' sound the well. I'd know if she's makin' wather."

Grant reported all dry and shipshape below, and McConaughy patted the bridge-rail in mute admiration.

"I'll tak' back some o' the harrrd worrds I ha' said," he declared. "Let a ship ha' appreeciation, Jock, an' she'll do the rest if ye give her the chance."

Jock nodded.

Evening found them crashing through a rising sea, well out of sight of land. Dikran Kalekian lay in his bunk, too limp to move, but the man he called his servant stood under the bridge, easily swinging with the motion of the ship and crooning a weird monotonic plaint as the salt-spray hissed against his face.

III



THE *Chambyses* dropped anchor in Morphou Bay late in the afternoon of the second day after leaving Alexandria. Fisher-boats, with wide-winged lateen sails, circled about them, and on the beach several groups of white houses showed against the green masses of the olive-trees. In the distance towered the blue peaks of the Olympus Mountains. Everything was peaceful and soft and quiet. They might have been a thousand miles, instead of less than one hundred, off the main trade routes.

"Well, I ha' done ma porrtion o' the worrk," said McConaughy to Dikran Kalekian, when the Armenian staggered on deck, white from the prolonged bout with the Mediterranean rollers. "Here ye are in Morphou Bay."

"It is well," Kalekian answered, with some return of confidence as he noted the

comparative stability of the deck. "One more favor, brave captain. Permit me a boat's-crew to take ashore my servant. George should procure the news we require from our friends here."

McConaughy nodded and ordered Jock Grant to have a life-boat lowered. Presently, it was pulling toward the beach, Kalekian's servant squatting in the bows like a figurehead of ill omen. Then two hours slipped by. It was dusk when the boat pushed off from the shore. As it broached to beneath the davit-falls, Kalekian called down a single question to his servant. The answer, hoarse, guttural and singularly brief, sent a flood of color into his face.

"You may go on," he said to McConaughy with a touch of arrogance. "Everything is satisfactory. Our friends are waiting us. The secret is still secure."

"An' that's good hearrin'," returned McConaughy, unimpressed. "What's the courrse?"

Kalekian hesitated and shot an interrogation at his servant.

"The course should be set for Cape Tchisme, at the mouth of the river El-Ashat," he answered, after George had talked to him for several minutes in the rough tongue they used. "It is about one hundred and twenty-five miles from here at the head of the Gulf of Adalia."

"Tis not information the most definite," said McConaughy, "and when we draw into the land, I'll be wishfu' ye should lend me your serrvant to con the ship."

"You shall have him."

The *Chambyses* slammed ahead all that night and the next day. Shortly after noon she raised a high, mountainous coast, and the Armenians were called to the bridge. At George's advice the course was shifted to northeast by east and they steered through a sullen ground-swell parallel with the coastline. The shore was rugged and bare of any evidence of human habitation. Aloft, dense forests clothed a few of the peaks and ridges, but for the most part the scene was absolutely desolate.

"What do ye call yon hills?" asked McConaughy.

"They are the Jeb-el-Aksar, a branch of the Taurus range," replied Kalekian.

"They're no very thickly populated, I'd swear."

Kalekian smiled sadly.

"Ah, sir, my poor people! They have been killed, so many of them. Once they were numerous. Now, these mountains that you see shelter the few poor remnants."

"An' that is the worrk o' they Turks?"

"Yes."

"The inferrnal butcherrs!" McConaughy ground his teeth. "To think o' Christians left to the heathen to be despoiled an' white men fightin' among themselves!"

If McConaughy had chanced to look sideways at that moment he might have caught the tiger-light that flared in George Costikian's eyes. But he was intently peering at the coast, and his mind was occupied with the visions of bloodshed and massacre which had just been conjured up before him. Nobody saw the light in George's eyes or heeded the faint curl of Kalekian's lip as he responded—

"There shall be due vengeance exacted, brave captain."

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when a bold headland loomed ahead, and George raised his arm, with the one word—

"Tchesme!"

They rounded the cape and entered the delta of a small river which flowed through a valley in the mountains, dropping anchor some three-quarters of a mile off shore. In the foreground a shabby fishing village huddled by the river bank. But what caught McConaughy's first glance was a white mass of buildings that crowned the landward extremity of the cape, where it soared upward in a flat pinnacle of rock, commanding the narrow valley and the course of the river El-Ashat.

"Is yon a forrtress ye ha' brrought us against?" he demanded suspiciously.

Kalekian laughed.

"Long years ago, my friend—yes. But now it is a ruin, used, it is true, by our friends as a hiding-place, because the ignorant of the mountains believe it to be haunted by great djinns and Afrits. We purpose with your kind help to remove the guns there."

"Do ye? I'm none so attracted by the looks o' it."

Kalekian looked nonplussed.

"Why," he protested, "what better——"

"I'll ha' ye rememberr," pursued McConaughy, "I'm rresponsible to the English at Alexandrria for ma carrgo. I'll not commit they arms to any place where they

may fall to the Turks. Ye told me the coast was deserrted an' ye bring me to a forrtress."

"A forrtress, brave captain? Not so," protested Kalekian. "A ruin, a haunt of outlaws."

"Outlaws, is it?" responded McConaughy. "Then I'll tak' a look at that same."

Kalekian shrugged his shoulders and held rapid converse with his servant.

"Have your own way, sir," he said, after George had spat out a couple of venomous sentences. "You will like the place better after you have inspected it, perhaps. But do not blame me to the English for the delay."

"I'll assume all rresponsibeelity," rejoined the Ulsterman. "Miles McConaughy never yet shifted his burrdn to any otherr's neck. Do ye mak' rready to go ashore. I'll be wi' ye dirrectly."

McConaughy stepped into the chart-house to give some parting instructions to the officer of the watch. He was in the midst of them, when the door was darkened by two figures.

"Well, Mr. Grant, Mr. Apgar?" he inquired sharply.

"Ye're gangin' ashore?" suggested Jock.

"Aye."

"Ye'll not go alone, then," said Evan.

"What d'ye tell me?" demanded McConaughy.

"Ye'll not go alone, whateffer," said Evan stubbornly. "We go in t'rees."

"Would ye defy me to ma face?"

"Harrk to the sense o' it," skipper," replied Jock imperturbably. "Ye wad gang shore wi' twa natives ye ha' no knowledge o'. 'Tis no judeicious. Think on it, an' ye'll admit the logic o' ma poseetion."

"Hecht," said McConaughy, "I see ye ha' the right o' me—an' the numberrers. Ha' done, then. We'll go together."

Jock and Evan beamed.

"Is the boat ready?"

"Aye," said Jock, "an' the big deil and the little deil are burrnin' the thwarrts."

"Who's the big deil, Jock?" asked McConaughy curiously. "D'ye mean Kalekian?"

"No, no. I'd gie ma oath the evil i' him isna the measure o' her i' the serrvant. That laddie has an ee I wadna care to meet on a blustery nicht i' the moors."

"Ye talk the like o' a prreacher," declared

McConaughy. "Evan, himself, wi' the flame in him, wouldna outdo ye. But we ha' no time for the like o' this nonsense. Come your ways wi' me."



THEY found the Armenians waiting for them with scarcely concealed impatience, but no comment was made and the party rowed ashore in silence. The fishing village was almost deserted. A few women and children regarded them apathetically, and a group of savage-looking, wild-haired men paid scant attention to the Europeans, but bowed low before the Armenians, with whom they engaged in earnest conversation—directing their remarks especially to George Kostikian, whose menial position did not appear to count in their estimation. It was he who dismissed the villagers with an offhand gesture.

Kalekian turned to McConaughy.

"Our friends will bring donkeys to carry us up to the old place." He motioned toward the white mass of buildings which dominated the river and its valley. "They have sent word to our people all through the mountains, and tonight we shall decide what is to be done about the rifles."

A less egotistical person than McConaughy might have noticed the underlying threat in the last phrase, the insolence of tone and expression. But it never entered the Ulsterman's head to suspect an Armenian, who had been seasick, of flouting him. McConaughy simply nodded and sat down on the ground to await the next move.

The donkeys, however, turned out to be excessively small beasts, and McConaughy and Jock Grant refused to trail their long legs on the ground, electing instead to walk. Evan, whose legs were short and who loathed any form of exercise other than the climbing of greasy ladders, readily mounted one, and they set off in single file up the valley.

The shadows were lengthening as they began the ascent, and by the time they had turned into a side gully evening had set in. But their guides climbed steadily, never amiss for the trail, and McConaughy and Grant, deck-wallopers that they were, soon began to pant under the unaccustomed toil.

"Hecht," grunted McConaughy, "this minds me o' the time I was a bit 'prentice in the old Orange packet, wi' the thirrd

officer timein' us over the cross-trees an'——"

Just how it happened none of the three could ever say. They had halted for breath, McConaughy and Grant some distance behind Apgar, when without warning they were set upon from all sides. Men in dirty white clothes dropped from the rocks around them, joining forces with their escort.

McConaughy and Apgar struggled without avail. Big Jock Grant managed to throw off the three foes who had fastened upon him, and to reach for the automatic in his belt; but before he could draw it he was down, and an instant later his hands had been jerked behind his back and made fast. In less than two minutes the fight was over, and the three white men were on their feet again, battered, dusty, cursing, but helpless.

"Ye swine o' the pit!" roared McConaughy, as he strained at his fastenings when Dikran Kalekian approached him with a broad grin of triumph. "Ye mak tak' liberties wi' the English Gov'ment, but Miles McConaughy——"

"If you do not be quiet I will order one of these men to cut out your tongue," said Kalekian softly, and somehow McConaughy believed that he meant it.

"D'ye call this Christian?" exclaimed the Ulsterman in milder tones. "We may not be the same color, but——"

Kalekian smiled a terrible, tight-lipped smile.

"You fool!" he snarled. "And you believed all that you were told—just as your foolish officers in Alexandria believed it!"

McConaughy's jaw dropped.

"Are ye not Christians?"

"Christians!" Kalekian spat like an angry cat. "We are of the Senussieh! We are the bitter foes of all things Christian!"

"But——"

"Silence! You shall hear your fate when you go before the Sheikh of El Senussi, himself."

The next hour was a nightmare. The three prisoners were pushed and pulled, flogged and dragged, up the steep ascent to the tableland of rock crowned by the old castle. On close approach it became evident that this structure was largely in ruins, but its general outlines were still complete, and it was manifestly a place of some strength.

At first they were flung into a narrow chamber beside the gateway, and here they were left for an hour under guard, forbidden to talk or communicate with each other. They were glad of the rest, though, for all were cut and bruised and sore. Then they were led out across a courtyard, strewn with huge blocks of fallen walls, into a great hall lit by numerous torches and crammed with men in dirty white robes and turbans, all armed with bright, new Mauser rifles.

Dikran Kalekian and George Kostikian sat at the far end of the room by themselves, but the "servant" sat above the "master." There was nothing servile about his appearance now. His robes were spotless, his turban was the green of the Hadji, his manner and bearing were those of a lord and a conqueror. And his eyes glinted cruelly as they roved over the three men in bonds before him.

"Bow down, you Christian dogs," ordered Kalekian.

"Not to a cur," retorted McConaughy with more vehemence than originality.

Kalekian made a sign, and three guards shoved the prisoners down upon their faces.

"So Christians must approach the Sheikh of El Senussi," announced Kalekian, and at the naming of the title the men in the hall pounded their gun-butts on the stones.

After their involuntary obeisance the prisoners were permitted to stand up.

"You are brought here for judgment," said Kalekian.

"Judgment for what?" rasped McConaughy, blinking the sweat and blood out of his eyes, his stubborn intelligence reaching out already to grasp the situation.

"As to how you shall die, brave captain. If you write for us a letter to your ship, telling the officer in charge that you are detained in the mountains and wish him to give up to us the arms, you and those with you shall die swiftly. If you do not—we of the Senussi have torments which will yet wring compliance from you. And believe me, even then your death will not be an easy one—though we have mercy on you and blow out your brains, as you will request."

"D'ye think ye're dealin' wi' children?" replied McConaughy contemptuously.

"No, with pliant human flesh."

"Who are ye?"

"The servant of this prince here."

He indicated Kostikian.

"And who is he?"

"He is the Sheikh of El Senussi—" again the thundering rattle of the gun-butts on the stones—"in this land, Vicar of the Vicar of Allah, who from his secret city in the deserts of Tripoli rules all Islam from Fez to Muscat and beyond to Delhi and Calcutta. To him bow all the Senussieh. His will is all powerful."

"Who are the Senussieh?"

"They are the followers of El Senussi—" yet again the battering salute—"the True Believers of Islam, Inheritors of all the World."

"Then ye are nought but Turorks," said McConaughy, craftily seeking to prolong the conversation, with an eye to reaping as much information as he could whilst the opportunity presented itself.

"You lie, Christian. The Turks are our servants. We use them for our purpose."

"But yourself—are ye not Arrmenian?"

"I was born Arrmenian. But the Senussieh are of all races, and the influence of El Senussi—" once more the thudding of the gun-butts—"reaches everywhere."

McConaughy drew a deep breath. This was no trivial plot.

"Ye ha' answered all ma questions," he continued. "Answerr me one more. Ye ha' guns. Why do ye want ma carrgo?"

"We can never have enough guns," replied Kalekian. "Those guns which you have brought are to go to our brethren in Egypt, who wait the signal to rise and join us in driving the English into the sea. Soon we shall give the word, and the Germans and the Turks will break the canal, and the Senussieh in their might will pour out of the deserts of Tripoli, the Sudan and the wastes of El-Arish. Then the English rule will die."

"It can't die soon enough to suit me," said McConaughy cheerfully.

"What do you say?" exclaimed Kalekian.

"I'm no more English than yourself, man. Nor are ma officers. I ha' no affection for the English, a dodderrin', self-satisfied race—to let the like o' this hatch under the noses o' them!"

"Would you recant?"

"Recant what?"

"Recant Christianity—accept the doctrine of Islam. You would not be the first."

McConaughy laughed silently.

"I'm thinkin' I'm one o' they primitive Christians ye were tellin' me about so eloquent. I canna change ma faith so easy, Mr. Senussi."

"Beware how you use that name," cried Kalekian. "It means death without mercy."

"An' that is all ye ha' promised me since I came here."

"It is what awaits you, fool. Its manner of coming is your only choice."

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders.

"Ye fair rival the English in your generosity, man," he said.

The green-turbaned Sheikh snapped something out of the side of his mouth, and Kalekian stooped hastily to confer with him.

"It is our Lord's decision that you shall be held in bonds for the night," he announced finally. "In the morning you will have an opportunity to write the letter of which I have spoken. It matters not greatly whether you do or not; the arms are as good as ours. But we will pay you with easy deaths for the lives of the men we might lose in an attack on the steamer. Think well in the hours which lie ahead of you, for our torments are not lightly endured. We will tear the flesh from your limbs slowly, strip by strip, until you yield. Better a quick death."

"We thank ye for the choice," said McConaughy dryly.

Their guards whirled them around and marched them from the hall.

IV



"A FINE pusiness, inteet!" complained Apgar.

Their guards had thrown them into a stone-walled room and shut the massive door behind them. For the first time they were alone and unwatched.

"Ye're no verra cheerfu', Evan," said Jock Grant, wriggling his pinioned arms thoughtfully.

McConaughy said nothing. He was walking about the dim chamber, lighted only by the moonbeams which streamed through a couple of gaping embrasures in the rugged walls high overhead, surveying the compass of their prison.

"And wot for should I be cheerful?" snapped Evan. "Hafe ye knowledge o' these Senussis? No? Well, for t'e com-

fort o' your soul, Jock, let me tell 'ee they are t'e cruelest heathens in t'e world. No maan knows t'e whole truth apout 'em. Efen t'e Turks fear 'em."

McConaughy joined them, humming a psalm-tune under his breath.

"'Tis not yet time to say your last prayers, Evan," he said. "Tak' heart, man. Ye're in the right, though, about they Senussis. From what little I ha' heard o' them along the Riff coast they do be fearsome devils. Prrotestants like they are, by all accounts, against the old-time Moham-medans."

"Hoot, 'tis little allowance they mak' for us that are Prrotestants, too," remarked Jock. "Wad ye not think, now, they'd appreciate we are no Papishers, an' claim some bit kinship?"

"Don't fash yourself, Jock man," returned McConaughy. "We're Christians. That's enough for them. Besides, we'll be kennin' their secret. D'ye see? There's the reason we'll ha' to get out tonight, if we get out at all."

"Get out?" repeated Evan. "D'ye mean escaap?"

"Why not?"

"T'e circulation is gone from ma haands, this hour back—an' if we had our haands wot could we do against stone walls?"

"Much, Evan. But firrst, 'tis true, we must free our hands."

He knitted his brows in deep thought.

"Gie your fingerrrs a chance wi' ma lash-in's, skipper," suggested Jock. "I ha' loosed 'em a wee bit. It wad be a sair pity if sailormen couldna unravel the knots o' they heathen."

The hands of all three were lashed behind them, and the first problem was how to enable a man to work on the bonds of a comrade. It was finally solved by having McConaughy and Grant squat down back to back. Thus placed it was practicable for McConaughy to pluck with his fingers at the knots of the fastenings around Grant's wrists. When McConaughy's muscular fingers tired—and this was soon, for the cramped position of their arms deprived them of all but a tithe of their normal strength—Evan Apgar took a turn at the work.

It was not easy. On the contrary, it was painfully slow. Their nails were worn to the quick. Utter exhaustion benumbed their aching fingers. But hour after hour

they stuck to it, and in the end sailor cunning triumphed and the ropes fell from Jock's arms.

A few minutes rubbing and pounding served to restore the blood to his paralyzed hands, and then he rapidly undid the fastenings of McConaughy and Apgar. Their plight was somewhat worse, for their hands were terribly sore from the constant picking at the rough knots.

But they wasted no time in commiserating themselves. McConaughy led the three straight to one of the embrasures, ten feet above the floor.

"There," he said, "Jock, do ye tak' Evan on your shoulderrs, an' give him a look outside."

The wiry little Welshman readily scaled Jock's giant frame and slipped into the embrasure as nimbly as a cat. The wall was all of six feet thick, and Evan was swallowed up in the cavity. But presently he reappeared, stretched flat on his belly.

"T'e waall trop's straight town," he whispered. "Put 'tis fery rutty. A maan might maak' it."

"What will be at the bottom?" asked McConaughy.

"T'e mountain-site, wi' plenty bushes."

Jock turned to his skipper.

"Let me put ye up, sir," he said.

McConaughy being up beside Evan, the two of them had little trouble in helping Jock scramble up the wall, for the huge Scotchman was agile, despite his weight. Then the three lay down in the embrasure and studied the descent before them.

For any men except sailors or acrobats it would have been sheer madness to attempt. The wall flared out slightly toward its base, which was fifty feet below. What made the descent at all possible was this flare and the added fact that the stones were laid in irregular courses, which the stress of bygone sieges and earthquakes had jarred still further from their set pattern, so that at intervals a man who was sure-footed and sure-handed might find minute toe and finger grips.

All this McConaughy grasped in a single sweeping glance.

"Tak' off your shoes," he said briefly. 'Tis a case for naked toes and quiet. I ha' a notion we'll fool they Senussi yet."

They took off their shoes and stowed them in their pockets. Then, one by one, they lowered themselves from the em-

brasure, caught the first insecure toe-hold and began the precarious descent.

They scarcely breathed. The rattle of a dislodged chunk of mortar sent their hearts throatward; and once, when Jock's bulk tore loose a crumbling block and he saved himself from falling only by a spread-eagled clawing of every vantage-point he slid past for a distance of ten feet, they expected to be shot at from the battlements overhead. But nothing happened, and five minutes later the three adventurers were safe in the shelter of a clump of bushes and drawing on shoes again over their blistered feet.

Jock chuckled from time to time as he wrestled with his laces, but McConaughy's face was very serious.

"Ma men," he said, as he stood up, "we owe thanks to the Powerr o' Faith tonight. I'll ask ye to pray wi' me in thanksgivin'—an' that we may ha' as successfu' an issue to what lies before us."

"Amen, amen," quoth Jock and Evan earnestly.

"God," said McConaughy, "ye ha' been uncommon kind an' forebearin' to us, your faithful, humble serrvants, an' we ask ye to help us out a little more in the harrd time that lays ahead o' us. We ha' been de-leevered out o' infidels an' idolators, who sought our apostasy, and if we had the courage to resist em we do not seek to arrogate that to themselves. No, God, we——"

And so on, for ten minutes longer, for McConaughy was a powerful prayer when he was fairly started. In fact, he was interrupted, while he was still forging strong, by Jock Grant, who began to fear that they were overdoing it.

"Skipper," he whispered delicately, "skipper, gin ye maun pray another spell, bide 'till we are gaun awa frae these deils i' the castle."

"Mr. Grant, I'll thank ye not to interrupt ship's prayerr's," said McConaughy sternly.

But nevertheless he desisted at the end of his next clause, and after droning a long "Amen," which was dutifully echoed by Jock and Evan, led the way into the beechwood that clothed the mountain-flank on which they found themselves. The contents of their pockets, including compasses, had been taken from them. But McConaughy picked his course by the stars, and struck off in a direction which he thought

would take them to the seacoast, although at some distance from the village below the castle.

It was now about three o'clock in the morning, and the stars were shining less brightly. Far off they heard the howl of a wolf; behind them loomed the white fairy mass of the castle, the "old place," as Kalekian the renegade had called it. For the rest, the Jeb-el-Aksar appeared deserted. But the fugitives were duly cautious and walked as lightly as they could.

They had gained the foot of the tableland, where the shadows lay thicker, when McConaughy heard what sounded like a stick cracking under pressure immediately in front of them. He motioned to his comrades to halt, and they waited breathless; but the noise was not repeated.

"Some peast o' t'e forest, maype," hissed Evan.

McConaughy nodded.

"We'll go on," he answered shortly. "If 'tis anything else there's no use in standin' still."

They stepped out into a little clearing and were instantly surrounded by a group of men in gaudily embroidered sheepskin jackets, some of whom carried antique rifles, others scythe-blades bound to sticks and still others vicious curved knives and heavy clubs.

"Do we fight?" said Jock, doubling his fists.

"Bide," ordered McConaughy, puzzled as the newcomers made no overt act against them. "Watch 'em. If they——"

There was a rustle among the sheepskins and a man stood forth of the group.

"What the ——!" observed the stranger. "Say, are yer Americans?"

There was a pause, and the sheepskins moved closer.

"Americans!" repeated McConaughy. "No, ma man, we're Brritish."

"Oh!" This in a palpable tone of disgust. "I thought yer might be from the little old U. S. A. One grand berg, bo, buh-lieve muh! And say, if I can ever beat up the carfare to get by the censor, it's me back to the old job, shufferin' a street-car in Pittsburg."

"Is the mon frae the States?" exclaimed Jock Grant in amazement.

"Sure," said Sheepskin.

"Whateffer would ye be toin' here?" demanded Evan Apgar.

"Search me, feller! If I'd a known when I was well off, I'd a stayed in Pittsburg. But, gee! I had to play the Smart Aleck. Get me? Wanted to come home and show the old folks all the sport clothes suits I'd bought wid me fifteen plunks a week. And look at me, now!"

He revolved as he spoke.

"I gets here just before this little scrap is pulled off. And what happens? I——"

"Are ye Arrmenian?" asked McConaughy.

"Well, I've taken out me first-papers back home, but that doesn't mean anything to the Turks. Sure, I s'pose yer'd call me Arrmenian. Anyway, I was born here, but I jumped the old lot when I was a kid, just after one of the massacres that they said would never happen again. Gee! And wasn't it just my luck to happen back in time for the biggest Mr. Mohammed has pulled off yet! Yeh! A regular double-header!"

"Where will ye ha' got that talk?"

There was suspicion in McConaughy's voice.

"Oh, I talk real United States. Yes, sirree. I went to night school—took a course in correspondence school, too. I was studyin' to be a lawyer."

"Ye talk like one," commented McConaughy. "Who might your friends be, young man?"

"They? Oh, they're same as me. But they're natives—never been off the home lot."

"What were ye doin' here?"

"Waitin' for yer, I guess, Mister. Say, s'pose yer give us a line on yourselves. We're the majority vote here. Yer don't talk like Turks, but them Senussis are a tony crowd. Yer can't never tell what they'll be up to."

"So ye know about the Senussis?"

"Know about—why, Mister, that gang have been raisin' the devil all through our villages. They've raided and burned and killed everything Arrmenian they could reach in these mountains."

McConaughy heaved a sigh of genuine relief. But a sudden thought checked him.

"Are ye Primitive Christians?" he inquired.

"What's that? Prim—what d'ye call it?"

"'Tis o' no matterr o' consequence," McConaughy hastened to answer. "As for ma

parrty, we ha' but just escaped from they Senussis ye speak of. I'm thinkin' the farrther we get from 'em the safer will it be for all concerned. So——"

"Oh, they can't do anything without me knowin' it," returned Sheepskin coolly. "We've got 'em well watched. If we had the arms we'd beat 'em up in great shape. I've got one fine young army back here in the woods, Mister Englishman."

"Brr-ghurr-zz——" cursed McConaughy. "Don't ye mis-call me again young man! D'ye think because ye ha' friends more numerous nor I that——"

"What's bitin' yer?"

"I'm no English. I wouldna be English. If I were born English I would drown myself. I——"

"All right, all right, old man. No offense. Pour ice-water on your head. Gee, what a bunch o' pep! Yer never mentioned your name. How was I to know?"

"I'm Captain Miles McConaughy o' Belfast. These——"

And McConaughy solemnly introduced his officers, the while the Armenians pressed about and watched with open eyes.

"Pleased to meet yer all," said Sheepskin. "I ain't stuck on meself, Mister—I mean, Captain—got it right that time, didn't I? But it was a darned lucky thing for yer that yer blew into me and not into some party o' ginks that wouldn't a savvied your lingo. How'd yer get here?"

As briefly as possible McConaughy recited their adventures up to that time. Sheepskin became visibly excited.

"And the Senussis haven't got your ship yet?" he cried.

"No."

The Armenian-American turned and jabbered frantically to his brother-sheepskins. They did not seem to comprehend him at first. Then all of a sudden they broke into yet more excited jabbers and several darted away into the forest on various errands. Sheepskin lent McConaughy his attention again.

"Look here," he said, "would yer like to get back at them crooks up on the hill?"

"The Senussis?"

"Sure. Would yer like to give it to 'em good and proper?"

McConaughy considered.

"Ye ha' not made clear your meanin'," he responded cautiously.

"Put it this way, then. I've got most of

our people that are alive collected in a safe place back in the woods by the coast. I've got 5,000 men there like these boys." He swept an arm around the circle of fierce bearded faces that topped the sheepskin tabards. "We'da been at the Senussis before this only we ain't got enough arms to go round. Now and then we cut off a little party, but most o' us have got nothin' but sticks and knives. Give us guns and we'd wipe 'em out, though."

The young man's eyes blazed as he spoke and his face glowed with emotional excitement. It was plain why he was leader.

"Say, Mister, it's a great chance for yer," he urged. "Wasn't yer sent here to arm the Armenians? Well, here we are, waitin' to be armed. What more do you want? Help us and we'll wipe out that nest o' rats up there—and there won't be no revolution in Egypt—nor no attack on the Canal, neither."

A low growl of assent arose from the other Armenians. They did not know the exact meaning of the words, but they could tell the drift of their leader's argument.

McConaughy looked at Grant and Apgar and they stared back at him. It was a big idea, beyond question, a big idea. But——

"There would be Turrkish throops in these hills?" suggested McConaughy. "Ha' ye orrganization? Can ye keep together?"

"Watch us! Just watch us! As for Turkish troops—no, there aren't any just now. They've all been withdrawn to Smyrna and the Dardanelles. They went away soon after the massacres. The Turks thought our people would be quiet, then. Organization? Well, Mister Captain, I swiped me plan from the way Boss Carney carried the election in the Twenty-third Ward the last election I was home. Let's see, that was '13. Yes, '13. Gee, it seems a long way back."

"'Tis ma belief ye ha' the gist o' a plan," said McConaughy slowly. "But 'tis no a thing to be decided in the blinkin' o' an eye. We'd best be movin' from here. Then do ye an' some o' your friends guide us to where we can get aboardd the ship and we'll talk it over wi' deeliberation."

Sheepskin looked disappointed. He was of the school of strategy which relies upon inspiration and charges with the precipitate haste of a Murat. But his face cleared as he reflected the real meaning of McConaughy's proposition.

"There's no time like the present, as we say back home," he replied. "But you're the doctor. Come along." He shot an eye toward the sky, which was whitening in the east. "It's gettin' late for tonight, anyhow," he conceded. "Well, we'll have to see about puttin' it over tomorrer, eh?"

He detailed several men to remain on picket-duty and watch the castle from that side, and then the entire party marched off through the forest, aiming for the coast.

"Don't yer worry," advised Sheepskin, as they started. "We won't have no trouble gettin' on board your boat. I know where there's a fishin'-felucca hid up a creek, and yer'll be safe widout the Senussis knowin' where yer are. Leave it to George, Mister, leave it to George."

After they were fairly on their way, McConaughy dropped back to a position beside Jock Grant.

"Well, Jock," he said, "now will ye admit the effeecacy o' perristant prrayerr?"

"Aye, skipper," returned Jock meekly, "but predestination is a concertrted worrk-in' o' Divine Will. Ye wadna——"

"Hecht! Predestination! Will ye never learn to drop that red rag whiles ye talk wi' honest, God-fearrin' Ulsterr Prrotestants? I'll leave ye to Evan."

"Pretestination, inteet!" spoke up Evan. "Ye shallna maak me waste ma time efaangelisin' t'e Scots."

V



THE small saloon of H. M. gun-runner *Chambyes*—as she is now called in the few wardrooms that know this story—stank with the acrid stink of half-cured sheepskins. Round the one narrow table sat Miles McConaughy, Jock Grant, Evan Apgar and their new Armenian friends.

The *Chambyes* rocked gently in the swell off the bar of the river El-Ashat. On deck her crew lay behind the bulwarks with rifles handy, watching the white mass of the old place, blazing in the morning sun on the southern headland, where lurked the sinister band that owned the rule of El Senussi, that almost fabulous figure of the Orient whose name is always whispered with a backward glance for eavesdroppers, whose hand stretches to every crack and corner of the world of Islam, who, from his unknown abiding-place afar in the burning

sands of the Tripolitan desert, pulls the strings that cause jehads, revolutions and uprisings, beyond the control even of the padishah, himself.

Now and then, as they talked, the Armenians in the saloon looked out through the portholes at the riven pile of the castle. It was as if they could never shake off the dreadful menace it contained for themselves and for all Christians on the barren Adalian coast, to which the fanatical rule of El Senussi had penetrated.

"How long ha' they been here, Sheepskin?" asked McConaughy with a scarce necessary gesture.

"Since the massa-cree began, last Winter. Nobody knows where they come from. First thing we knew they were here. They killed a heap more'n the Turks, so at last the Turks were afraid of 'em. They seemed to have spies everywhere. They're bad people, Mister. Yer wanter get that straight."

"Ye won't need to be tellin' me," responded McConaughy grimly.

"Aw, yer got off easy. They can do things wid ramrods an' pine-splinters—we're wise to 'em."

"D'ye ken a man named Kalekian—Dikran Kalekian?"

"Do I? Say!" Sheepskin cursed with an unchecked brilliance that brought admiration from McConaughy, who could appreciate the efforts of a brother artist.

"Ye'll ha' learrned that in the States?" commented the Ulsterman.

"What? Oh, yes. But look here, Mister Captain, this Kalekian's got my goat. He was one of our big men, rich, had a carpet factory in Smyrna, and traveled a lot. He helped organize the Hunchakis—that's our secret society—like the Masons, d'ye see?—only wid a political twist—and when we found he was a spy—well, we went all to pieces. The Turks caught most of the leaders in the coast vilayets, and then he brought in this gang o' Senussis and they done the rest."

McConaughy chuckled silently.

"I'll tell that to the English in Alexandria," he said. "'Twas Kalekian perr-suaded 'em to send me wi' arrms an' ammuneetion for the sufferrin' Arrmenians."

"Well, we're here," responded the Armenian. "We're the sufferin' Armenians, all right."

"Aye, but this isna a matther to be proceeded in wi'out due caution," answered McConaughy. "I'm responsible to the English for ma carrgo."

"Aw, what d'yer want? We can't buy the guns off yer. But give us a chance and we'll smash the Senussis. Ain't that enough? How yer goin' to protect us if we don't get arms?"

Jock Grant leaned his ponderous bulk across the table toward his skipper.

"Wadna the judeecious course be tae draw up a contract, douce an' prroper?" he suggested. "A bit paper for the prrent—"

"Sure, that's the dope!" assented Sheepskin enthusiastically. "Better make it a contract. You deliver the goods to us, and we'll deliver to you for value received. That's the stuff."

"Hecht," said McConaughy, "I'm no lawyerr man to be scribblin' o' terms an' agrrrments."

"Leave it to me, bo, leave it to me," advised Sheepskin airily. "Was it for nothin' I took the correspondence school course in law? Let's have paper."

Evan Apgar tore a sheet out of an old log-book he took from a drawer and pushed it across the table, together with an indelible pencil.

"Will ye waant aaught else?" he asked.

But the Armenian, already driving his pencil doggedly across the paper, did not hear him. The others watched the birth of the great idea in silence—compulsory, on the part of Sheepskin's followers, for they could not speak English.

"How's this?" demanded Sheepskin finally. "Contract agreed between me, Tony Papastikian, for the Armenians of the Jeb-el-Aksar, and you, Miles McConaughy, representing the English—"

"Eh? What will ye be puttin' there?" interrupted McConaughy.

"Don't yer represent the English Gov'ment?"

"I do not, young man," roared McConaughy. "Will ye never tak' it in through your thick head that I willna ha' anything to do wi' the English?"

"Well, who do yer stand for, then?"

Followed a hasty conclave between McConaughy and his lieutenants.

"Ye'd best put 'the British Gov'ment'," he amended, somewhat mollified. "Me representin' the English! Underrstan',

Sheepskin, I ha' no obligations to the English. They ha' pushed me into every tight hole I ha' ever escaped from."

"If yer not English, what in—are yer?"

There was irritation in the tones of Tony Papastikian.

"I'm an Ulsterrman." McConaughy rolled out the word impressively. "An' a subject o' the British Empire—though I do not hold wi' kings an' emp'rorrs."

Sheepskin grunted impatiently.

"Are yer through talkin'?" he demanded. "Cause if yer are, we can get on to business."

"Get on—but rrememberr I'm no English."

Papastikian grunted again, laboriously crossed out the word "English" and added "British Government." Then he paused, with his head on one side, and considered the document.

"That you will give us free all the guns and ammunishun we need," he continued at last. "That we will attack the Senussis after that. That we will agree to wipe out all the — skunks."

"What will be skunks?" asked McConaughy suspiciously.

"Its a mean animal wid a bad smell."

"Man but ye ha' the gift o' worrds! Let it stand. It couldna be more prprecise."

Tony Papastikian beamed with the pride of authorship.

"Have I put enough in it?" he inquired diffidently.

McConaughy now studied the paper.

"Ye'd best add to it, 'and give all possible aid and help to the British Government in fightin' the Turrs and Gerrmans,'" he advised. "I misdoubt ye talk betther than ye spell, but that's a small matther. Now, we'll sign."

Slowly and with infinite care, McConaughy and Papastikian traced their signatures, and then McConaughy carried it to his own cabin and locked it up in the ship's safe.

"Now, what's to do?" he said upon his return.

"My idea, before yer pull off a stunt, is to caucus on it," remarked the Armenian. "Get me? Sit and chew the rag until the vision comes home to little Willy."

"A most extraorrdinar' mannerr o' speech," whispered Jock Grant hoarsely into Evan Apgar's ear.

"Aye," said Evan a little moodily—he had

not had much chance at the conversation. "An' the tonkey lofes his pray!"

McConaughy did not heed these disgruntled comments—if he heard them. His mind was leaping forward over the campaign ahead of him.

"Firrst, to get the guns landed," he remarked abstractedly. "But before that we must ha' a plan. What will it be, Sheepskin?"

"For gettin' the guns ashore yer must pull outer this hold," replied the Armenian. "It's too close to the devils. I know a place twenty miles southward on the coast, where yer could lie safe."

"Can your people meet us there?"

"Sure. Yer wouldn't want'er get there until dark—yer can loaf around outer sight o' land until sundown, then run in. We'll be ready."

"An' ye ha' five thousand men?"

"Five thousand, Mister. We've got maybe seven or eight hundred guns, most of 'em old."

"An' what will yourself do?"

"I'll stay to shuffer yer in. The rest o' my bunch can go ashore and spread the news—see?"

"An' afther we ha' prrovided ye wi' arms?"

"We'll go as far as yer like. But for plans let's wait 'till we hear from our spies watchin' the Senussi."

Ten minutes later, the eagle-eyed sentries on the battlements of the old place saw a fishing-boat leave the side of the *Chambyses* and slant off down the coast. Five minutes afterward the rusty tramp heaved her anchor and pointed her nose straight out to sea, disappearing presently in a cloud of her own smoke, hull-down upon the brazen horizon.

VI



IN THE twilight haze the *Chambyses* crawled back toward the land.

The goal of Tony Papastikian was a small natural haven, sheltered by a rocky islet off the mouth of a creek. Of rivers that coast is guiltless, save now and then a stream of the proportions of El-Ashat—which is the reason for its barrenness—and in fair weather no better port could have been desired for the landing of the cargo.

McConaughy, however, had developed no inconsiderable affection for the pot-bellied old tramp, and he insisted upon sending off

a life-boat with a leadsman to pilot them into the anchorage. So it was all of eight o'clock before the *Chambyses* swung to her riding cable.

On the shore blazed innumerable campfires, and the hum of an excited multitude came off to them on the wings of the gentle breeze. Torches waved back and forth over the water as a fleet of jimcrack craft swarmed about the *Chambyses'* iron sides, yelling questions and greetings to which Sheepskin replied as best he could in the confusion.

"Say, Mister," he hailed McConaughy, "do yer want any o' these guys to help unload?"

"Bid them keep off if they wouldna be scalded by the fire hose," roared McConaughy. "Where would we get wi' a mob the like o' that? Ma own men will land the arms at the beach and there ye will see to the distribution and reporrt to me."

Another life-boat was dropped from the davits and pulled alongside the forward hatch. Evan coupled up the donkey-engine, a sorely decrepit contrivance, which had a hacking cough and the wheeze of an insomniac—the deck-hands stripped the hatch-cover, and the first box of Martinis, with the king's broad arrow stamped on the boards, was jerked over-side.

As soon as a boat was full it put off and rowed ashore to a point where Jock Grant was stationed and Papastikian marshaled his countrymen in orderly lines that stretched away into the fire-lit gloom. When two stacks of cases, one containing rifles and one cartridges, had been accumulated, Sheepskin commenced serving them out as the lines passed him, and Jock marked down the numbers on a mammoth indent-sheet.

It was close on to dawn when the procession of small boats ceased and Jock rowed back aboard to report wearily:

"Fower thousand fower hun'ert an' twa, Sir, wi' twa score loons nae satisfied wi' their old guns an' clamorin' for new. But gin their breech-blocks wad worrk I'd na gie them new ones."

"Rrrright, Jock man. An' now we'll tak' a snooze. Hecht, we ha' earned it. Ma bones ache."

In fact, all on board the *Chambyses* were so tired they were ready to drop. With never a thought of what lay ahead of them,

they sank down wherever they chanced to be. McConaughy slept on the bunk in the chart-house. Jock and Evan and a stray quartermaster or two lay on loose canvas in the open on the bridge. The crew were scattered from end to end of the decks, and few expended the energy to seek their quarters.

Judge, then, of McConaughy's surprise, when, upon awakening shortly after noon, he chanced to glance overside and saw what appeared to be the columns of an army marching and counter-marching on the shore.

"Are we bethrayed?" he gasped to himself, snatched binoculars from a rack and leveled them on a martial figure which crowned a small elevation of rock in the midst of the mobilization. "By the power o' the Presbytery, 'tis Sheepskin! What does he here, Jock, Evan!"

Jock and Evan responded by yawning and rolling over on the deck. McConaughy promptly kicked them mercilessly.

"Owch," yelped Evan, who was the tenderer of the two. "Hafe ye no feelin's whateffer for t'e saantcity o' rest? T'e curse o' Whytisfyrdie on ye!"

"Ha' done your currsin' an' look at Sheepskin's army," replied McConaughy.

Grumbly, Evan lurched to his knees, seized the binoculars and leveled them on the bridge-rail.

"St. Daaviti!" he muttered involuntarily.

Jock, aroused by this, propped his big frame on an elbow and peered through the weather-screens. His keen eyes gripped the spectacle at a glance, for Jock made up by his sharpness of visual perception for his mental sluggishness.

"A bonny wee army!" he said admiringly.

"Wee army, is it?" returned McConaughy with some indignation. "I'd go from here to Smyrna wi' it, if the looks o' it do not lie."

"Aweel, skipper, there be but five thousand o' them," said Jock cautiously. "An' Arrmenians are no the like o' Aberdeen men i' the thraw o' a ficht."

"Aberteen men, intee!" Evan chuckled. "Whaat for use are Aberteen men pesite the men o' Harlech?"

"Whisht, whisht!" ordered McConaughy. "We'll go ashore. Jock, call me up a boat's-crew. Evan man, sift through your fire-room and pick me out the handiest men o'

their hands to tak' wi' us. We must leave some wi' the ship."

While his subordinates executed his instructions, McConaughy went below with the carpenter who soon reappeared on deck with several heavy coils of rope and a collection of light timbers, all of which were lowered into one of the life-boats.

"What for ha' ye brought that tackle?" inquired Jock, as he came up.

"For a very important purrpose, Jock. 'Tis a well-known fact that a birrd which can fly out can fly in."

"Hoot, ye're speirin' me," said Jock gruffly.

But Evan, who had overheard the conversation, nodded sagely.

"A laatter, skipper?" he observed. "'Tis a goot defice."

"Ye posturin' bit mon," growled Jock. "Wad ye seem tae be——"

"I would use ma wiits, Jock," grinned Evan, as he slipped down a davit-fall.

Jock looked about to make sure no member of the crew might be within eyesight to observe such a grievous breach of ward-room discipline, and then leaped on the same falls, coming down behind the Welshman with a rush that threatened the safety of his fingers.

"Ye misbegot clabberjaws!" exclaimed McConaughy, leaning over the bulwarks, whence he had witnessed this incident. "Are ye schoolboys or men? Ha' done wi' this or I'll orrdher the two o' ye back aboarrd to guarrd ship. We ha' work before us."

Jock and Evan merely grinned up at him. "'Tis the fechtin'," admitted Jock. "The fechtin' always goes tae ma head."

"Well, see it goes no farrther. I'll meet ye on the beach—an' use care for that tackle I ha' trusted ye wi'."

When McConaughy came ashore at the head of twenty picked men of the crew, whom he had selected to be his personal guard on the expedition, he found his First Officer and Chief Engineer squatted in the sand and splicing foot-long strips of timber at eighteen-inch intervals between two sixty-foot ropes, to the accompaniment of a running fire of gibes from Evan, aimed at Jock for having failed to understand what the rope-ladder was for.

After turning over to them the men of the crew for direction and guidance, McConaughy strolled up the beach to where

Sheepskin and a group of the bearded elders of the Armenians stood, supervising the drilling of the refugees.

At this close range he could appreciate even better than on shipboard the regularity of ranks, the method and system of organization. The men drilled in proper units, by platoons, companies, battalions and regiments. They had the proper officers and non-commissioned officers. Moreover, although they were undeniably clumsy, yet they had a distinct perception of the rudiments of military drill and tactics. If they were slovenly in slopping from column of squads into company or battalion front, nevertheless, they instinctively knew the meaning of the different formations. Here was no green, untaught mass of men, McConaughy instantly realized. That aggressive zest for instruction and leadership which distinguished Tony Papastikian evidently had been turned to good account.

"This isna new to them?" remarked McConaughy.

"Don't ye believe it! Say, I wanter tell yer I've sweated some blood to beat this business into a bunch o' backwood guys like these."

"Where did ye get the knowledge yourself?"

"In the militia—back in the States. Sure, I done me time. Riot duty, too."

"Ye are a man o' penetration, I see," commented McConaughy. "'Twas in ma thoughts we'd ha' to delay operations whilst ye taught these men not to shoot themselves. But they could marrch the morrow's dawn, I should say."

"Before that," answered Sheepskin. "Tonight's the time. Have yer got a minit? Well, come on over here wit me an' listen to the reports I got this mornin' from me scouts."

He led the way to where a rough shelter of timber and rocks had been thrown together. In the background—in fact, all around the area occupied by the armed men—McConaughy noticed crowds of women and children. If there were five thousand men, he computed hastily, there must be at least twenty thousand non-combatants.

"The Senussis are up in the air, buffaloed," began Papastikian, as they sat down. "Get me? Yer see, when you fellers disappeared yer left 'em guessin'. They never

believed men could get down that wall widout breakin' their necks——"

"Aye?" interjected McConaughy. "Well, they'll learn whiles that men can get up it—wi'out brreakin' their necks."

"An' it was hours afterward they caught on to it that yer musta bumped into some o' our people," continued the Armenian. "Fact is, they didn't get wise 'til they saw the boat we took yer off in comin' ashore. They were hot—specially when yer went away, an' they knew they'd lost the guns. Gee! I hear what happened to that guy Kalekian was a caution!"

"How would that be?" inquired McConaughy with genuine interest.

"Why the chief o' the Senussis blamed it all on him. First they beat him wid ram-rods. They they beat him wid raw-hide whips. Then they poured vinegar on to his back. What they done after that I don't know. Buhlieve me—he got his!"

"An' where do ye learn this confidential information?"

"I got a spy in the village down by the mouth o' the river. He slips it to me scoutin' parties. See?"

"Aye. Now, why d'ye advise attackin' tonight?"

Sheepskin hunched forward, his eyes blazing with excitement, nervous fist punctuating his remarks.

"They've got a big powwow on tonight. A couple o' Turk generals an' a German officer have come to talk wid 'em about this drive at the Canal an' the revolt in Egypt. Then I sent 'em word askin' terms for the Armenians that hadn't turned coat an' come in. They sent back word that all who turned Moslem could go back to their villages. The fellers I sent were pretty poor-lookin' sights an' they got the Senussis to believe it was all up wid us. They'll never look for anything like we can spring tonight. I tell yer, Mister, this is the time."

"An' how would ye attack?" questioned McConaughy.

"Attack?" We'll come up on 'em widout their knowin' a thing—we can cut off the outpost they have in front o' the gate o' the castle. Then we'll just pile through the gate."

"Aye, but 'twill cost ye a heap o' men."

Sheepskin waved his hand impatiently.

"Maybe. I guess yer right," he admitted coolly. "But what o' that? We got the men."

"Will they ha' machine-guns?"

"Sure. They got two, I heard."

McConaughy shook his head.

"Ma friend, ye ha' the speerit, but ye are unaccountably rash," he pronounced. "'Tis conceivable ye might win through as ye ha' planned wi' bombs. 'Twould be likely an' 'twas just like the English to fit out a modern army wi' never a thought o' heavy orrdnance. But I wouldna ha' great hopes, an' for one I decline to risk ma life in a fool adventure the like o' that."

"Are yet goin' to quit?" demanded the Armenian indignantly.

"Quit? The thought was never in ma mind. Hark to me, young man. Ma counsel, now——"

For the next five minutes Sheepskin's part in the conversation was merely to nod his head at frequent intervals, but before long the frown which had gathered on his face was replaced by a beaming smile and as McConaughy concluded he jumped to his feet with unsurpassed enthusiasm.

"That's the stuff!" he cried. "Say, Mister, can I be a general in your army. This is your party. You're the boss."

"Ye can that," returned McConaughy heartily. "We'll show the heathen a trick or two, eh?"

VII



SILENT as ghosts the Armenian columns poured through the ravines of the Jeb-el-Aksar in the early moonless hours of the night. No sound was made by the thousands of feet shod in bulls'-hide sandals; the browned metal of sights and slings refracted no light from the dim star-shine; and miles ahead crept a veil of scouts to prevent detection of the movement.

They marched by three different routes, so that there might be no delay in the concentration of their entire strength, and the rocky ground, which would have tried troops bred to the plains, proved no obstacle to their steady three miles an hour.

McConaughy and his men were with the center column, which was commanded by Papastikian in person; and as it was impossible for them to keep up with the swift, remorseless pace of the mountaineers, they were mounted on hardy little ponies that trotted along, no matter how rugged the

way. It was just over twenty miles to the stronghold of the Senussieh, and the three columns met at an appointed spot in the mountains, some two miles distant from the old place, shortly after midnight. Here the scouts reported their observations.

There had been much going and coming all day in the castle, they said; but in reply to McConaughy's questions, translated by Sheepskin, they admitted that an outpost was still stationed at the end of the tongue of land, upon which the castle stood, where it joined with the escarpment of the mountains above the river. The members of this outpost, camped among the rocks, were constantly on the alert.

"Ye'll concede ma point was well-taken," said McConaughy to Sheepskin, when he brought this out. "By the plan ye proposed ye would ha' butchered the outpost, and then swept across the neck o' rocks up to the castle gate, wi' machine guns trrummin' the life out o' ye. Few o' ye would ha' come through at the end o' all, an' they few might betther ha' died."

"Yer got the goods on me, old timer," Sheepskin cheerfully acquiesced. "There ain't no doubt o' that, though I do think we coulda wiped 'em out my way, before they got us all."

More questions deduced the fact that a mounted party of Turkish and German officers had arrived during the afternoon.

"Did they ha' escort?" demanded McConaughy.

"No, they came alone," the scouts agreed.

"Hecht," said McConaughy, "I misdoubt that we ha' complications here. The Turks wouldna dare ride along through this counthry. Well, five thousand men is more nor we need for the matter in hand. Sheepskin, do ye pick out a judeccial, circumspeckshus man, give him a thousand rifles, an' we'll depute to him the covverrin' o' our rear an' the line o' rre-treat, so to speak—though rre-treatin' is the last thing I ha' in ma thoughts."

The Armenians were already divided into five regiments, each one thousand strong, and one of these regiments promptly was told off, assigned a position to occupy, and filed away into the night. McConaughy was gratified to notice that the men obeyed the orders with alacrity, even though many of them must have supposed that they were being deprived of the opportunity they had

long hankered for to come to hand-grips with the ruffians who had burned their villages and slain their families.

"Now," said McConaughy, "'Tis time to concert measures. Sheepskin, I'll ask ye for one hundred men for ma own purposes—young, lusty lads."

Papastikian vanished, to reappear fifteen minutes later with the pick of his four remaining regiments.

"They'll do," said McConaughy after a careful inspection. "For the rest, do ye advance wi'in range o' the outpost an' wait there for the noise o' ma attack. Aftheer that—drive through 'til we shake hands."

"I got yer." Sheepskin saluted smartly. "Say, we won't do a thing to that gang."

The two parties divided. Papastikian, at the head of a solid column of nearly four thousand men, tramped up a gully that would lead him to a position whence he could look down unseen upon the castle and its approach, biding the signal to link his efforts with those of the smaller party, under McConaughy, who had branched off to the left, aiming to strike through the forest which had sheltered the *Chambyes*' officers the night of their escape, and so gain the foot of the castle walls.

An hour's march took McConaughy to the forest edge within view of the soaring bulk of the old place. A wan moon was trying to shine through the sea-mist, and its filmy light made the white walls look all the more substantial and massive. Outwardly, they seemed deserted.

But why should a watch be kept upon this side of the fortress? Surely, the Senussieh might believe that no men could scale these precipitous walls, even if three mad Franks, by some magic unknown, had contrived to slip down them without leaving their mangled bodies at the base.

"Dod, skipper, she looks a guid bit more deefcult fra' the bottom than she did fra' the top," whispered Jock Grant. "Gin I had seen it firrst fra' this end I wad ne'er ha' tried it wi' ye."

Evan shivered.

"It maaks me 'maazed-like at me temerity," he gasped. "Got must hafe peen fery kind to us."

"Well," said McConaughy grimly, "'Tis as I said—if a birrd can fly out he can fly in."

"Ye'd ne'er attempt tae go up that wall?"

exclaimed Jock. "Man skipper, ye're daft—just daft! It canna be did."

"It will be did," retorted McConaughy.

"Oh, sir, think petter o' it," appealed Evan. "Haat I t'e true itea o' t'e place I would nefer hafe encouraget ye in it."

"Would ye mutiny?" asked McConaughy bruskiy. "Ha' done, ye silly gowks. Ye talk the like o' women. 'Tis a matther to be attended to an' forasmuch as 'tis a dangerous matther I'll attend to it masef. But by the same token, 'tis comparatively simple."

"But ye'll peril—" began Jock.

"Bide," ordered McConaughy firmly. "Ha' ye e'er turned me from ma path by worrds? Now, do what I say."

"Aye," said Jock and Evan meekly.

"There will nought happen to me. But if there should, then, Evan, do ye thry the wall. An' if ough happens to ye, then Jock shall thry it. If ye canna mak' it, then go to Sheepskin, tell him so and thry to carry the place by storm. That's a'."

Then, to their surprise, McConaughy commenced to undress. Evan nudged Jock and Jock nudged Evan. Finally, Jock cleared his throat and inquired huskily:

"Wull—wull ye be—ah, that is—d'ye feel a' richt i' ye're head, sir?"

McConaughy ceased operations—he was down to grayish-white under-flannels, and was drawing on a pair of heavy white wool socks over the pair he had worn—and regarded them calmly in the moonlight.

"Jock," he said, "if ye or Evan—aye, Evan man, I see ye squintin' there—ever again thry to insinuate that I'm loony, I'll tak' over a cloth-packet for the privilege o' mast-headin' the two o' ye for the fool 'pprentices ye are."

Having delivered himself of which statement, McConaughy stood up, serene in his all-but-nakedness, and fastened a light rope around his waist. Next, from a pocket he produced a long, flat steel chisel and tied it loosely to his wrist by a bo'sun's lanyard.

"I'm ready," he announced. "Evan, ye'll stay here wi' the Arrmenians!" He communicated this intention by vigorous signs to the natives who had watched his conduct with sibilant wonder. "Jock, ye an' the *Chambyes*' men will come wi' me. Bring that ladder an' the spar I gave ye."

This last was directed to several of the crew who carried the bulky coils of the rope-ladder Jock and Evan had made, together

with a substantial spar some seven feet long.

"An' the firrst man up afther me will bring ma clothes an' arms," added McConaughy. "Do not be forrgettin' that. Quiet, now, through the underrbrush."



THEY picked their way among the low bushes that covered the gentle upward slope that formed the foundation for the castle walls. McConaughy carefully had selected the section of the wall down which he and his lieutenants had climbed, reasoning that the knowledge he had then gained of its cracks and crannies would now serve him in good stead, whilst the room they had occupied would form a safe place for his little band to congregate against the time they should be ready to make their rush.

At the base of the wall, Jock gave his chief a single hand-clasp, and McConaughy turned to the white cliff before him. He took the chisel that was tied to his wrist, slipped it into a crack, and, with this leverage to assist him, found a slight projecting ledge for his foot, and commenced the upward climb.

The first few steps were easy, and almost before the men crouching in the bushes had a chance to draw their breaths he was above their heads, blending tonelessly into the background. But then came a time when he poised spiderlike against the sloping flatness of the wall, feeling here and there within range for a cavity or projection in which to put one foot. Splaywise, in their loose heavy socks, McConaughy's toes—prehensile as only a sailor's can be—explored the gritty surface. A hole an inch or two deep in a decayed course of mortar was enough for them. Sometimes when footholds failed, he reached arm's-length above him, jammed his chisel into a crack and hauled himself upward by sheer muscle to a more profitable level. Once even this failed, and for a space those who watched below waited expectant, looking to see his body swing loose from its slight support and crash to the ground.

But McConaughy clinched his teeth, and, sprawling sideways by one arm, caught hold of a narrow ledge and dropped easily to new footing. There he rested for several minutes, panting exultantly.

"Hecht!" he muttered to himself. "There was a while ye looked the Recorrdin' Angel i' the face, Miles McConaughy."

And he waited, after he had regained his wind, to offer a fervent prayer.

Refreshed, he started upward again, taking care to zigzag back and forth across the face of the wall, so that always he had the window of his former cell directly above him. This was what he aimed for. Had he chosen to follow the whimsicalities of the masonry he might have won to another opening, or even to the upper battlements, in less time than it required to gain the one he sought. As it was, his singleness of purpose came near to causing disaster almost at the moment of victory.

Inch by inch, McConaughy had scaled thirty feet, more than half his distance. He had struck a comparatively easy stage, following the course of a jagged crack, the result of some earthquake in centuries past, and he forgot to remember that the shattered blocks presented a menace of their own, as well as an assistance. He was mounting blithely, the chisel clinched between his teeth, relying entirely on toe and finger grips, when suddenly a ledge under foot gave way and one hundred pounds of masonry clattered down the wall.

For a moment, then, he hung by the tips of his fingers, arms jerked well-nigh out of their sockets by the sickening plunge. He could feel the flesh give as his fingers sawed the uneven edges of the stones. Yet more terrifying still was the murmur of harsh voices overhead and the patter of unshod feet on the battlements.

There was one thing to do, and one thing only. Desperately he fought for a safer hand grip, drove his toes into such holes as opportunity offered, and pressed his body close against the wall. He praised God at that moment that the chisel was in his mouth, cutting cruelly into the corners of his lips where it had been driven by the shock of that first downward plunge, but safe where its steel blade could not glint up at inquiring eyes.

Again the watchers below held their breaths in anticipation of disaster. But the two sentinels who came to the battlements merely glanced downward casually, their eyes sweeping over the white excrescence upon the white wall with never a thought of suspicion, and turned away again. The djinns and afrits—in whom the Senussieh, fierce modern regenerators of Islam, do not believe—might try to scale that monstrous height; but no man born of woman, least

of all the fear-driven Armenians who were the only foes to be expected, would risk his neck so uselessly.

McConaughy, of course, never saw their eyes pass by him. He clung to the stones, motionless as a lizard, until a brief hiss from below told him he was free to climb again. He was more careful, now, choosing his holds with meticulous precision, testing out every ridge and cranny to make sure it would sustain his weight.

He was up so high that he dared not look down. Whenever he removed his attention momentarily from the stones in front of him, he glanced aloft to make sure he was trending toward his objective.

At the last, he did not dare even to look upward; a trembling began to develop in his limbs; his hands shook; his body quivered. Iron man that he was, McConaughy was near his limit. It was with a thrill of hysterical surprise that he saw the window beside him, a bare arm's-length away.

The sight gave him renewed strength and confidence, and he worked sideways slowly, to a position whence he could step onto the sill and grasp a projecting corner of the lintel for balance. But at this last moment, too, failure all but tripped him, for he forgot the rope trailing from his waist, and, as he released his hand-hold and started to shift his other foot to the window-sill, the line caught about his ankle. He tottered, reached out blindly for support, and by blind luck grasped a friendly ridge in the masonry. Then he sank down on his knees and crawled shakenly into the deep recess in the hollow of the wall, glad to lie at full length and fight down the sobs of terrible exhaustion that owned him.

From this faintness he was aroused by a strange noise that smote through his weariness like a trumpet-blast of alarm. Huddling to his knees he listened for a repetition of it, holding the chisel before him as a weapon to resist attack. Once, twice and three times, McConaughy breathed softly, and the gloom was soundless. Then the noise was repeated, a persistent groaning that broke into an ineffective, protesting babble of formless words and phrases.

Forgetting his bloody lips and fingers, his sore toes and joints, McConaughy crept forward along the embrasure, until, sprawled out on his stomach, he could look down into the stone-walled room that had been his own prison. The recurrence of the

groan guided his eyes to a formless heap in one corner.

"Whateverr it is, 'twill be no hindrance to us," murmured McConaughy to himself. "Whiles I ha' finished here, I'll look to the poor man. He'll be some wreck o' the hatred o' these Senussi scoundhrels, like enough."

Crawling back through the embrasure, he twiggd the rope pendant from his waist. Immediately it tautened under a heavy weight, and very slowly and with all due caution against bumping and knocking down more stones, he hauled up the spar. Placing this beside him he dropped the rope again, and presently, in response to a tug at the lower end of the line, began hauling up the rope ladder, which, with the rope, he made fast to the spar, dexterously splicing the upper rung to the timber in such a way that it would support safely an immense burden.

When this had been accomplished to his satisfaction, he pushed the spar back through the embrasure, and swung it around inside the chamber so that it reached across the window from side to side and formed an effective anchorage for the rope ladder.

Then he crawled to the outer end of the embrasure and waved his hand as a signal for the ascent to begin. Simultaneously, he descried a thin line of figures creeping from the edge of the forest and knew them for Evan and his Armenians, who must have been watching with hawks' eyes in the darkness.

The ladder was already creaking with the load of two men climbing it, and as the first man was about to clamber on the window-ledge, it swayed to one side under an abrupt accession of weight, and he reached out wildly for support, with a muttered ejaculation.

"Ye onhandy scrapple o' the pit!" snarled McConaughy. "Would ye give us, rready bound, to the Senussis?"

"Nae, skipper," returned Jock mournfully, as he crawled up beside him. "But I ha' just drappit ye're clothes."

"Dropped ma clothes!" repeated McConaughy. "Oh, ye——"

He choked with the emotion of it.

"Look at me!" he commanded. "Misther Grant, d'ye considherr ye are showin' the due respect and considerration for your superiorr officerr he has a right to expect

when ye compel him to go about in the garb o' a Lascarr?"

"I ha' brought ye're arrms, sir," pleaded Jock.

"He'll ha' brought ma arrms!" McConaughy apostrophized the stone walls about them in a tragic whisper. "Tell the loon that comes afther ye to pass the worrd——"

But the far-off "durr-durrr-durrr" of rifle fire that swelled rapidly into one sonorous, smashing roll of thunder, reverberated out of the surrounding mountains and tore the words from McConaughy's mouth.

Overhead and about them they could hear the old place waking into life. Orders were shouted; bare feet, swished over the stone pavements. Yet there was no confusion. The Senussieh went about their tasks, sought their positions, with the promptness of disciplined men.

"'Twill be Sheepskin," said Jock, not unready to shift the attention of his wrathful skipper to another's blame. "The canty gomeril! He wouldna bide 'till ye——"

"Hold your clamor!" interrupted McConaughy scornfully. "Can ye not tell the firin' is more nor two miles yon? Ay, 'tis beyond that. Sheepskin hasna fired a gun. But I miss ma rreckonin' if he isna forced to repel an attack from the castle here. Hecht! A good plan gone wrong! We're i' the hands o' Providence this night, Jock, an' it's ma opeenion Providence will expect us to shift for oursel's."

In the meantime three other men had scrambled into the embrasure, which was becoming over-crowded. McConaughy cocked an attentive ear to the turmoil without, then hitched himself forward to the inner edge.

"Well, we'll be about our own share o' the business," he said. "There'll be no time to be lost. Let me down, Jock—an' if ye jarr me, man, but I'll trim the hide o' ye wi' ma chisel here. So."

Swung from Jock's brawny arms, McConaughy dropped easily to the floor of the chamber, caught the rifle that was pitched after him and stole toward the door, forgetful of the prone figure in the far corner, which had now ceased to groan. One by one, the *Chambyses*' men followed him, and the Armenians had begun to arrive, when a wild shriek resounded between the stone walls and broke into frantic gibberish:

"Oah, yes! It is ghosts! Verily ghosts!

Djinns and afrits come to haunt me! Oah, holy saints! Oah, Allah, all-merciful, compassionate! Oah, devils of all religions——"

VIII



McCONAUGHY dropped his chisel, with which he had been prying at the lock of the door.

Staring at him from the heap of rags in the corner was the ghastly figure of what had once been a man. Crusted blood was smeared over the remnants of its face and in its hair; its nose was slit and one ear was gone; its scabbed fingers twisted and clutched and twined; the naked shoulders that rose from its filthy coverings were seared and criss-crossed with a network of terrible welts and open, bleeding cuts.

"A mon!" murmured Jock Grant.

"Got saafe us!" whispered Evan. "It was a maan."

Fascinated by the loathsome horror of the thing, McConaughy approached closer to it, and in terror the spectre withdrew into its rags.

"You would not hurt me," it gabbled aimlessly. "No, the brave captain would not hurt me. The brave captain is now a brave ghost, is he not? Hee, hee, hee! A brave ghost. We are all brave ghosts. Gentlemen, don't you want to buy some beautiful rugs? I have a consignment just arrived from Persia. Yes, gentlemen, they are not machine-made factory impostures from Aleppo, but the genuine article. All the way from Persia and beyond. Real Baluch stuff—a prayer rug from Kalatka—and there is a rose and gold gem sent me by a mandarin in Pekin. Rugs, rugs, rugs for—but won't anybody buy? Won't anybody buy of poor Kalekian? Oah, no, no, no! Do not beat me! Oah—the knife—not the knife—not again——"

The gabble died away in a scream of racked torment.

There was not a man in the room but shivered.

"It's—it's Kalekian!" gasped McConaughy.

A pair of fever-light eyes gleamed up at him from the cowering creature.

"Oah, yes," it mumbled. "Kalekian—Dikran Kalekian. He was a rich merchant of Smyrna. All know Kalekian. Hee, hee, hee!"

Several men made a mad break for the

door. It was too much for them. McConaughy, himself, felt his stomach turn.

"Heaven forgive me that I ever wished vengeance on the man," he said hoarsely.

"Ay," agreed Jock. "But, skipper, what wad ye do wi'—it?"

McConaughy shook his head.

"Do? What can we do?"

Nevertheless he put down his rifle and bent closer over Kalekian. But the sight of McConaughy's blood-smeared face threw the tortured man into a paroxysm of terror.

"No, no, don't do it again!" it pleaded. "Don't cut me again!"

McConaughy drew back, almost as if he feared the clawlike hands that waved at him.

"Hecht!" he said, "I do not like to leave——"

The stammering chatter of machine-guns close at hand made the thick stone walls tremble.

"Quick!" yelled McConaughy, forgetting all about the thing that had been Kalekian in the sudden emergency of the moment. "There'll be no time to waste, men. Sheepskin will ha' had to attack. We must get out o' this before they slaughter him."

Half a dozen men threw themselves against the huge door, but it barely quivered beneath the shock.

"Stand aside," McConaughy ordered. "Fire into the lock. All together, now! Aim carefully! Fire!"

Twenty sheet-jacketed bullets tore through the great timbers and the metal work about the fastenings.

"Again," demanded McConaughy. "That will be enough. Jock, give her they shoulderrrs o' your's."

Jock flung himself into the door like a human battering-ram, and it gave perceptibly.

"Half a dozen o' ye again," urged McConaughy.

The half a dozen hit the door in a mass, 900 pounds of hard bone and sinew, and it ripped outward, letting them through in a tumbled heap into the vaulted corridor beyond.

At the far end of the passage a smoky torch was stuck into a ring on the wall. From the distance echoed the clamor of voices, and dominating all, the rolling staccato clatter of rifle fire, punctuated at intervals by the sinister note of the machine-guns. Warily, McConaughy led his party,

now more than fifty strong, along this corridor in the direction of the fighting. Behind them trailed a string of late comers, hastening to catch up with the advance-guard.

Nobody appeared to challenge them, and after threading a succession of murky passages they emerged into the great hall, where McConaughy, Jock, and Evan had been interrogated before the Sheikh. As they pressed toward the entrance, several of the Senussieh, in their white robes, ran out of a side door, checked in astonishment at sight of the intruders, and then turned to flee. One of them McConaughy shot dead, the other staggered under the impact of a bullet in the shoulder, but contrived to get through the door, and could be heard screaming a warning to his friends.

"Afttherrr the scoundhrrels, men," shouted McConaughy. "Keep together—and make for the machine-guns!"

With a savage cheer, in which the Armenians shrilly joined, the *Chambyses* men—who had been the *Joan of Arc's* men and before that the men of the *Emmaline Pankhurst* and the *William and Mary*—closed up behind him. There was a hurry-scurry in the half-light of the dawn, a clash with a little knot of silent men, whose eyes glowed fanatically in their dark, bearded faces; and the invaders found themselves in a courtyard, fighting their way to the gate, where the Senussieh were standing off Sheepskin's hordes from behind piles of shattered stones.

Up to the present, McConaughy perceived, Sheepskin had satisfied himself with developing a strong feint attack, but had not ventured to push assaulting lines across the neck of land swept by the machine-guns. His rifles buried the gateway in a hail of lead, and he had been waiting for the arrival of McConaughy in the foe's rear—a fact of which he was duly apprised by the flurry of shots in the interior of the Castle. Now his men began to come out in the open, taking advantage of an attempt by the Senussieh to shift one of their machine-guns, so that it could be trained to the rear.

McConaughy saw this move, too, and started to intervene, but a German officer, who had been directing the gunners, leaped at him, sword in hand, and behind this man poured a torrent of the white-robed warriors of El Senussi, voiceless as wolves taking their prey.

"Aim from the hip!" McCaughy bel-
lowed hasty warning to his slender band.
"Don't raise your guns to fire!"

He fired once as he had directed, but then the German was upon him and he had to lift his rifle to block a slash at his head. This was new work to McCaughy, but evidently an old story to his assailant, who wove a ring of flickering steel about his torso.

"Hecht!" muttered McCaughy, as he leaped three feet backward to avoid a cut at his arm. "I ha' carv'd maself wi' ma chisel. Now will I let this brash tinsmith despoil me? By the powerr o' the Prresby-terry, I——"

And dodging a vicious thrust, he drove his butt into the astonished German's mouth.

"That willna be the prroper way to fence, I misdoubt," he told himself, with some satisfaction. "But 't will ha' merrits."

The Senussieh had charged with empty rifles, relying on their bayonets. But McCaughy's order to shoot from the hip had given time for three fair volleys, which sent the Moslems reeling backwards behind heaps of dead and wounded.

"The machine guns!" shouted somebody.

But the firing had cluttered the trail-pieces of the mounts with bodies, and it was no easy thing to disentangle them. One gun still bore on the approach to the gateway and was belting lead into a mob of Armenians that would not be cowed by death. The other McCaughy reached in the nick of time to prevent its being used to sweep his party to eternity. He dealt the breech-mechanism a blow with his rifle that jammed the cartridge-belt, and then set himself to resisting the frantic efforts of the enemy to recapture the gun before it was too late.

Back and forth in the gateway the conflict swayed. McCaughy and his men, shoulder to shoulder, stood in a swirling eddy of several hundred of the Senussieh. They were crowded too close to be able to shoot. It was a case of butt and muzzle—crash to the skull with the butt and dart straight for the eye with the muzzle, relying on the peep-sight to flick up into the brain.

While it lasted it was warm work—warm and fast. Men went down on all sides. McCaughy and Jock took Evan in between them and guarded his small body as best they could, but Evan more than earned

his protection by lightning dashes to the front, which always served to lessen the pressure and account for a man or two.

The end came when Sheepskin forced his assaulting column up past the one workable machine gun and filled the gateway with thousands of crazy Armenians, who cut loose right and left, crumpling the last dauntless opposition of the Senussieh in five minutes of merciless hand-to-hand fighting.

McCaughy was profiting by this diversion to wipe the blood from his eyes, when Jock seized him by the arm.

"Yon, skipper! D'ye see? The tall mon wi's robe half off—him wi' the green turban—he'll be George, him that ca'ed himsel' Kalekian's serrvant."

McCaughy readily glimpsed the man Jock indicated. He had worked out of the fighting zone and was running toward the great hall and the warren of passages that lay beyond it.

"He'll be thryin' to escape," exclaimed McCaughy. "We must ha' the rascal."

Others saw the fugitive and joined in the chase, realizing that a man who wore the badge of a Hadji must be worth capturing. One or two shots were fired without effect, and the hunted man glanced back over his shoulder. He redoubled his pace at sight of the pack on his heels, and reached the entrance of the great hall with a safe margin to spare.

Here McCaughy expected the quarry to disappear, but when the Ulsterman burst through the doorway he found the men who had been ahead of him shrinking backwards from the grewsome spectacle that was being enacted in that chamber of tragedy. All thought of pursuit was abandoned. Most of them seemed to prefer the outer air.

"What's wrong wi' ye?" cried McCaughy as he shouldered his way forward. "If the man stands, get aftherr him. What for——"

Then he saw what was happening, and his jaw fell, too.

In the center of that enormous room, where a few nights before the gun-butts of his followers had thundered salute to the shadowy presence of which he was the embodiment, stood the Sheikh of El Senussi, Vicar of the Vicar of Allah, mouthing and slaving, his features convulsed with a frantic fear that was not of this world. Round him in an ever-narrowing circle

crawled the remnants of Dikran Kalekian, in its torn claw-like fingers clutching the chisel with which McConaughy had scaled the castle wall.

As it crouched nearer, this red ghost of Kalekian whimpered like a dog nosing after a rat, and the tall man in the green turban seemed to shrink and shrivel and grow small, whilst he moaned and mumbled inarticulately, in a way that sent the cold shivers down the spines of the men in the doorway, who had just seen eight hundred die by steel and bullet.

Suddenly, Kalekian flitted close to his victim and slashed the chisel down his face.

"So!" he babbled, with high-pitched childish laughter. "How does that feel, Lord Sheikh? Your mouth is gone. But a good workman finishes his work." Again the swift dart of the keen flat blade, and a whine of animal pain. "And now your nose. Behold! We are as babes of the same birth, we two. It irks me to spoil your beauty so. Yet it must be done, Lord Sheikh. Once there was a man named Dikran Kalekian—do you remember him?"

Kalekian had resumed his crouching circuit, so close now that he could reach out and touch the Sheikh at will.

"Yes, Dikran Kalekian, that was his name," he rambled on. "He was a very rich man. He sold carpets—good carpets. All the Franks bought from him. He was known and respected—Dikran Kalekian. He—" the specter paused abruptly. "But Kalekian had only one ear and you have two. That will never do. Hee, hee, hee! Never do, never do!"

The chisel flashed, and the shivering, hypnotized hulk of the Sheikh screamed in agony.

"God!" swore McConaughy. "I canna stand it! Are ye ready, men? Shoot them down. They are neither human."

The rifles cracked and the two figures of horror in the center of the great hall swayed and sank in a single heap.

IX



McCONAUGHY and Sheepskin clasped hands in the courtyard, as the last of the prisoners—there were not many of the Senussieh who suffered themselves to be taken alive—were marched away.

"A clean sweep, mister!" exulted Tony

Papastikian, brigadier of sorts and sometime Pittsburg motorman. "Some job for a bunch o' amachours, eh?"

"It might ha' been worrse," McConaughy admitted. "But what for did ye spoil ma program?"

"By jumpin' me attack? Sure, that wasn't me; that was you. D'yer remember yer told me to send out a thousand men in case there was another bunch in the ring? Well, an hour or so after yer left me they began to raise the devil. The Senussis in the castle here got worried an' started out to investigate, bumped into me first line—an' zip! There yer were! I had to kill the nosey guys to save me own crowd."

McConaughy was all interest.

"Ha' ye heard from the coverrin' forrce?" he asked.

"Yep. Just got a message. They ran into a camp of Turk cavalry, the escort o' that German officer you beaned. An' believe me, them guys took a lot o' beatin' up. But we nabbed the whole bunch. There ain't a Turk wit'in a hundred miles o' us. It's a clean sweep, I tell yer. An' we got this country, now, so they'll never get it away from us again."

"So farr, so good," said McConaughy. "But ye must orrganize, ma young friiend, if ye would preserve your gains."

"Organize? You bet. We'll form the Republic of Armenia right here. And say—" the conception of a great idea flamed in Sheepskin's face "we'll make yer the first President! How 'bout that, eh? Ain't that a peach o' a scheme? You for President, and me—well, I'll be yer Secretary o' State or Minister o' War, or maybe the Vice-President or something like that," concluded Sheepskin modestly.

"Beforre we begin to discuss affairs o' state, I'll preffer to be rightly clothed," replied McConaughy drily. "For the prresent, I——"

He coughed apologetically, with a glance at his figure. Miles McConaughy was a self-respecting man and he was acutely conscious that there were several serious, not to say dangerous, breaches in the suit of heavy woolen under-flannels in which he had climbed the castle wall and then fought through a hand-to-hand action.

Papastikian chuckled.

"Yer do look kind o' queer," he agreed. "Little bit wore out, eh? Well, we'll talk about it after yer get dressed."

When somebody finally brought McConaughy the clothes that Jock Grant had dropped from the rope ladder, he took a wash, had Evan, who was a skilful man with his hands, bind up the innumerable cuts and sores he had sustained from head to toe, and then turned in for what he called a good "on-shore" sleep. It was well into the afternoon when he woke up, and Jock brought him a cup of tea and a dish of lamb stew from the Armenian mess.

"Evan an' me ha' been guarrdin' ye like Sir Ed'arrd Carrson i' Dublin," announced Jock. "Dod, skipper, but they Arrmenians are daft-like! They willna let ye be."

"Why? What's up?" asked McConaughy, quaffing his tea in deep gulps.

"Awcell, I'm not richt i' ma mind what they are after," admitted Jock. "But they ha' been holdin' clavers o' one kind or anither a' the day whil' ye slept, wi' niddle-naddle this an' argie-bargie that. Evan nor me canna mak' head nor tail out it a'. Whiles Sheepskin comes an' asks us if ye are waked, an' if ye are not will we wake ye. An' at the long last, I just plain told him he could gang awa' or I'd gie him the fore-end o' ma boot."

McConaughy grinned.

"Hecht, Jock, that will be no way to speak to the Prresident o' Arrmenia."

"The Prresident o'—are ye daft, too?"

"Jock, ye're too given o' late to suspectin' folk o' daftness," reproved his captain, drawing on a much-worn pair of trousers with the studied luxury of a Sybarite. "An' by the way, Jock, ha' ye ever considherred the throe benefit o' pants to a man? Tak ma word for it, ye can ha' no apprreeciation o' what they mean 'till ye ha' gone a day wi'out them."

Jock withdrew into himself with a manifest air of injured dignity.

"Gin ye ha' feenished ye're tea, I'll be lookin' to the men," he said coldly, and departed.

Mr. Grant's footfalls had not ceased to stir the echoes of the stone-walled halls, when Sheepskin appeared timidly around the corner of an adjacent corridor.

"They wouldn't let me get to yer," he said sulkily. "Say, there's been great doin's."

"What will that be?"

"Well, yer elected."

McConaughy seemed to be surprised.

"Elected what?"

"President—President o' Armenia."

"Am I so? Hecht! That will be grrand honorr, I confess, though I'm by no means considherrin' maself worrthy o' it, Sheepskin. An' who elected me?"

"The manhood suffrage o' the free Arrmenians here assembled," declared Sheepskin pompously—it sounded as if he was reciting something from memory. "But say," he added eagerly, "I pulled yer stuff in the caucus. There never was nobody else in their minds. I saw to that—though one or two old guys tried to say you wasn't eligible 'cause you wasn't a native. I tied a can to that bunk. Hope yer'll remember that, Mister President."

There might have been a twinkle in McConaughy's eye, but Sheepskin did not see it.

"This is a very deeficult mattherr," he said. "I'm a citizen o' Ulster an' the British Empire, d'ye see? An' I'm a mastherr marriner, wi' obligations to ma ownerrs. 'Twould in no ways coincide wi' ma duties to accept the honorr ye do me. Also, I ha' it in ma mind that there's a man would be an excellent Prresident nearer to hand."

"Who's that?" demanded Sheepskin with some disappointment—almost suspicion.

"Well," answered McConaughy deliberately, "if a man's to be Prresident o' a people he should talk their lingo. Isna that right?"

"Sure."

"He should be one o' them. I ha' seen enough o' the curssed habits o' the English, always rready to tak' over an' govern some alien race, to know that a people should be ruled by themselves. For ma authorrity, I'll referr ye to history."

"But look here, Mister, there ain't one o' these Armenian guys that knows enough to come in out o' the rain," interrupted Sheepskin. "That is, exceptin' me," he amended quickly.

McConaughy clapped him on the shoulder.

"Ay, just so. An' ye'll be the man I mean. Ye'll mak' a firrstrate Prresident, wi' a little experience, Sheepskin; an' on certtain conditions—" he paused weightily—"I'll lend ye ma supportt an' countenance."

"What are they?"

There was no mistaking the candidate's attitude.

"In the firrst place, ye'll hold your power

from the British Crown. I'm not very parril to crowns, Sheepskin, but wi' us the crown isna harrmfu'—'tis nought but a easy way to avoid concentration o' authorrity. An' anyways that's the law o' it. Ye'll ha' the standin' o' a prrotectorrate."

Sheepskin calculated swiftly.

"Sure, that's all right," he decided. "A protectorate means that the big feller fights all the little feller's battles, pays his debts an' builds up his trade. I learned that in America. Any more?"

"Secondly, ye'll grrant prreferential privileges to Brritish commerrce in your porrts—ye ha' none, but that's a matther o' detail."

"As long as I ain't got any porrts, I guess I'll stand for that," said Sheepskin cheerfully.

"Thirrdly," McConaughy went on, "ye'll hold your power as Prresident o' the Rrepublic o' Arrmenia, an' your successorrs in the office will hold their's, subject to a supervisory Board o' Control to consist o' me, Miles McConaughy, the Managin' Dirrector o' the Red Funnel Line, Sir Edward Carrson, the Rev. Dr. Ferrgus McLash o' the Sammis Street Presbyterrian Churrch in Belfast, David Lloyd George, an'—I hate to put this in, Sheepskin, but we'll need something like it just to diddle the English—the Arrchbishop o' Canterbury."

Papistikian considered for several minutes.

"Are all those guys located in your home-burg?" he asked at last.

"They rreside in the Brritish Isles—if that's what ye'll mean."

"Well, I'll take a chance on that condition, too. What's the next?"

"Fourrthly," continued McConaughy, "ye'll enter into an alliance wi' the Brritish Government an' its Allies in the present war."

"I guess there ain't nothin' else for me to do," said Sheepskin. "But say, in return for that do I get fixed up with ammunnishun an' things?"

"I'll use ma best endeavorr for ye in Alexandria."

"All right, then. It's a deal. We'd better go out an' tell me friends about it all."

Of the political scene which followed, it is only necessary to say that McConaughy spoke for exactly seven minutes, and that Tony Papistikian translated the speech of

"his great and good friend"—he was careful to break into English now and then to enable McConaughy to be reminded of the touching friendship between them—for an hour and a half, at the end of which oration he was elected unanimously as the first President of Armenia.

X



ABSTRACT from the log of H. M. S. *Helare*, destroyer:

Nov. 21, 1915; off the coast of Asia Minor; Lat. 36 degrees fifty minutes N., Long. 31 degrees 35 minutes E. About ten A. M. today, whilst steaming past Cape Tchesme in the Gulf of Adalia, we were hailed by a ketch which came off to us from the mouth of a small river. Lay to, and covered him with the forward twelve-pounder, suspecting a trick to torpedo us.

He came alongside, and a man boarded us who called himself Papistikian. He asserted that he was President of a Republic of Armenians established in that vicinity and that his people not only were independent of H. I. M., the Sultan of Turkey, but were under the protection of and in alliance with H. B. M.'s government. This person, a most peculiar individual who talked English with an obvious American accent, requested us to send word to the proper authorities at Alexandria to ship him a quantity of arms and ammunition, claiming that we were obligated to do so in return for treaty rights granted by him to us.

"He also gave us a paper which he asked to have sent to Captain Miles McConaughy, in care of the Red Funnel Line, Belfast. This latter message, which was unsealed, read as follows:

"DEER CAPTAIN: This is to tel you that the Republic is geting on fine. I have got 10,000 fighting men now but not near enuff guns for them. Will you tel the rite peple to send me some more guns and some ammunnishun.

I could do with 10,000 more rifels as more men are coming in every day. We have got 100,000 peple in the Republic now and they are bilding new villages in the hills on the coast, where the Turks can't get at them. We had 1 scrap with the Turks after you left us, but we went out and fort them without waiteng for them to come to us. They got al they wanted and sinse then we have not herd from them. That is al, except that we have not got any flag and we want 1.

Will it be al rite to have a flag with red al round the edges and in the middle of it a wite spot with a red star. Plese put this up to the Bord of Controle,

and let me know P. D. Q. Al are wel and send regards, hoping you are the same and wishing we mite have another fine scrap agen some time,
respectfully,
TONY PAPASTIKIAN.

"P. S.—I notis we ain't herd anything from the Senussis. Have you. I gues we did i prity big favor for the British Government, eh? They ort not to be stingy with a litle ammunishun and guns." "

Endorsed by the Chief of Staff to the Admiral Commanding-in-Chief on the Eastern Mediteranean Station, and referred to the British Diplomatic Agent at Cairo.

Endorsed by the British Diplomatic Agent at Cairo and referred to the Sirdar.
Endorsed by the Military Secretary to

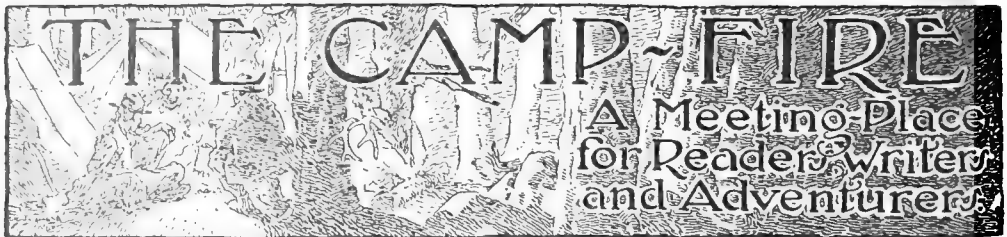
the Sirdar and referred to the Principal Intelligence Officer, Alexandria.

Endorsed by the Principal Intelligence Officer, Alexandria, "Approved and respectfully referred back."

Extract from the *London Times*:

OUR NEW ALLIES IN ASIA MINOR (Special dispatch to the *Times*.)

Alexandria, Jan. 5, 1916 (delayed by Censor).—A large shipment of arms and ammunition has been landed by our naval forces on the coast of the Gulf of Adalia for the use of Armenian communities in that vicinity who are successfully resisting Turkish oppression. It is said that the efforts of these people have been of material assistance in the defense of the canal.



HARRISON R. HOWARD, with his first *Adventure* story in this issue, follows our Camp-Fire custom, and introduces himself:

Twenty-eight years of age. Born in San Francisco. Educated in California institutions. After finishing school I became possessed of a desire to obtain some genuine, first-hand education, and struck out for myself. Six weeks after, I sailed out of the Golden Gate; and for some time followed the sea.

One day, while our vessel was loading at a large saw-mill, I decided to go into the woods and study the quaint characters who live their lives in the shadows of the forest. For several years thereafter I worked among the lumber-camps, afterward drifting down into the saw-mills.

After a couple of years of this I returned to California to take up the profession I have been these many years preparing for. In my story "In the Sawdust Country" I have attempted to give an impression of the aristocracy which exists among these men of the lumbering world, and the method by which one outsider made entrance into their fellowship and their respect.

I THINK that the following story from the Border about himself will embarrass Mr. Woon very much indeed, but I agree with Charlton S. Blum, who wrote

the story and sent it to me, that it ought to be recorded. Certainly Mr. Woon has no cause to blush from anything except modesty. I also agree with Mr. Blum that Mr. Woon is a "reticent sort of fellow where his own work is concerned." I knew him several years ago when he was in New York and a member of the local chapter of the Adventurers' Club and have kept in touch with him by letter since then. He's told me about a number of things other men have accomplished but I've yet to hear him say much of anything about his own deeds.

Basil Dillon Woon, who is here for the *New York World*, has been telling me about the Adventurers' Club and advising me to join. He told me to write to you about it.

I AM not quite sure, however, that I am eligible. I am not an "adventurer" in any true sense of the word, though I have traveled quite a bit. I was born in Canton Province, China, and came to this country when a child. I have followed about every trade there is, I guess, but mostly newspaper work, which at present has me in the harness. I have been pretty nearly all over Europe and lived four years in London, being over there when the war broke out. I tried to enlist, but they wouldn't

take me; physical disability. I was with the U. S. army in the Philippines, where a Moro bullet put me under for several months; have never been quite the same man since. I was a newspaper correspondent with Madero during his revolution and first met Woon there, he being at that time a kind of private secretary to Francisco Ynocente the Martyr.

BY THE way, has Woon told you about that experience of his with Langhorne's column into Coahuila? I used to think the days of adventure in connection with the scoring of newspaper "beats" were over, but Woon's stunt has kind of changed my mind. I heard it first from Floyd Gibbons, of the Chicago *Tribune*, who was with the expedition at the time, and managed to get Woon to admit the main details after several hours' consistent pumping. He's a reticent sort of fellow where his own work is concerned.

In case you haven't heard about it, I'll tell you. Maybe it will be of interest to Woon's friends of the Camp-Fire, of which we have been mutual readers for many Summers. He'll probably be looking for my scalp for telling the tale, but—here goes:

THE Glenn Springs raid near Boquillas, Texas, happened on the night of the fifth of May, as you know, but was not known at the railroad, 110 miles north of Boquillas, until the following Sunday morning, owing to there being no telegraph. Woon was at Ojinaga on the fifth, attending a Cinco de Mayo celebration, but on the following day he went up to Marfa, on the railroad, to send a wire to his office, then the International News Service. Next morning the news of the raid reached Marfa and Woon shot over to Alpine in a car, intending to file the first story and then get down to the trouble zone. He'd have done it, too, only that an interfering county judge or somebody arrested him for carrying his .45 and belt—a thing that he had every right in the world to do, because he had only just come to town and was a traveler.

However, by the time he got out of jail, an hour later, the Western Union office had closed for the day, it being Sunday, and Woon had to get in an auto and file his story at Marathon, which is the terminus of the Boquillas wagon-road. He filed it at three o'clock in the afternoon, but the operator handled the train orders, too, and Woon's story, that should have been a beat, didn't get off until the next morning, though he didn't know that until later. Meanwhile Brandenburg of the A. P. had got into Alpine, picked up an old A. P. operator on the hummer and persuaded the W. U. officials to reopen the office, with the result that he scored a beat.

THINKING that his story was on its way to New York, Woon went on down on that awful road to Glenn Springs, arriving there two days ahead of any newspaperman and getting some pretty good feature stuff, I believe. And when Major Langhorne's tiny column of 140 men crossed the river and went in chase of the bandits Woon went with them and participated in the record ride of 120 miles in 48 hours that followed.

Jesse Deemer, the Boquillas storekeeper whom the bandits had kidnapped, was rescued on a Sunday. On a Monday the censorship was lifted and Woon

discovered that one of the other correspondents had sent a Mexican in on a mule with a bulletin. There was just one thing to do, and it speaks volumes for the pluck of the man that he did it.

HE BOUGHT the only remaining mule and saddle at the El Pino ranch and started to beat that Mexican to the border. The mule was about nine hands high, but was a sturdy little brute, according to Woon. The way lay over a burning desert. The first water was 28 miles away. Woon started with only three hardtack biscuits and a canteen of water—the rations had given out—and got to the first water by sundown, having started early in the afternoon. He stayed there that night and was forced to pay a Mexican five dollars for two meals, not having any smaller change. He says that hurts him yet.

THE next morning he started off for the next water, 28 miles farther on, the Rancho Alamitos. Arriving there at noon, he found Colonel's Sibley's relief column of the Fourteenth cavalry there and told Sibley of Deemer's rescue. Sibley offered him an escort but Woon was afraid it would be a hindrance, so refused it. He started off at one o'clock, but at five his mule gave out and he stopped at a water-hole ten miles along the road and gave the brute a rest until eight o'clock; then he went along six more miles and camped under a mesquite brush. At daybreak the next morning he was off again, and after that there was no more water until he reached the river 35 miles further, and 4 miles from Boquillas. He got there at one o'clock in the afternoon, sold his mule for \$10 by a stroke of luck, snatched a bite to eat and was off in an auto that had been awaiting him for the railroad.

They got in to Marathon at precisely midnight, first with the Deemer rescue story. Woon found an order for a thousand words waiting, it being too late to write more. He thumbed it out and then went to sleep on the floor of the telegraph office, dead to the world.

OH, YES, I forgot to say that Woon beat the Mexican to the border by seven hours! And he (the Mex.) had had a day's start. I think that ride on a little old Mexican mule of over a hundred miles in exactly two days, with only three hardtack biscuits for rations, and through a desert country peopled with murderous bandits, was something worth while—something that ought to be recorded. I don't know whether his office sent him a bonus or not, but evidently somebody appreciated him, or he wouldn't be with the *World* now.

Anyhow, he's a fine chap, and I'm proud to call him a friend.

I GIVE you this extract out of a letter from William Dudley Pelley because, though his story in this issue is laid in the more thickly populated part of Vermont, we have met *Hooty* before and are likely to meet him again and in wilder parts of the Green Mountain State.

Also, how about this matter of adventure a-plenty in parts of the country generally

supposed to be entirely too civilized for any kind of adventure that doesn't connect up with the police court and all the rest of the regular machinery of an old civilization? The current of progress has left a good many little eddies behind it where people are very scarce indeed and primitive adventure is easy to find. But where are they? Sounds sort of interesting to me. Let's have some "dope" at the Camp-Fire soon.

And here's Mr. Pelley's letter for a starter.

Frank E. Howe, late Lieutenant-Governor of Vermont who knows this State better than any other man in it and who goes off with me in my car on holidays following our mutual hobby of poking away in the old forgotten roads and crazy desolate districts of this mountain State, said to me a couple of days ago while reading one of my *Hooty* stories in manuscript.

"What do you go off to Montana for locating your stories? There's more queer people, lost districts, juicier adventure happening every day right here in these Green Mountains that's never been tapped than has happened in Montana for the past decade."

"But it's so close to home," I replied. "Adventure is rarely adventure unless it's in some far-off place across the horizon."

"Yes," he argued, "but when you're writing for a magazine with national circulation it's just as much interest to the fellow in Montana to see a yarn located in the mountains of Vermont as it is the reverse."

And I've begun to think that some of the mountain-smothered, lost villages here in New England's back yard would be a darn sight more adventure for a Westerner than for the Easterner who might follow the beaten story-path and go to Montana. I know places in these Green Mountains where my brother-in-law and myself have tramped for days and never even seen signs of human habitation. We've been out hiking where the trail just a few minutes ahead of us was plastered with bear-tracks as thick as the carpet in a Methodist church on a rainy Sunday morning shows boot-heels. They've just killed three thousand doe and deer around this vicinity within the past two weeks and we've come on settlements where the kids literally went crazy—really frantic in fright—at sight of a stranger.

I MENTION this just to acclimate you if I should pull some more *Hooty* stories here in the Green Mountain State. After I get back from my trip to Montana I'll have to get you up here and take you for a three days' tour by a plucky automobile diagonally northeast of Bennington County off through the back districts and lost mountains. Folks think Vermont is wholly civilized because it's within four hours of New York. I venture to say I could show you some characters who live in these back districts who have figured in county murder trials, hangings, game-warden fights, etc., that would make you doubt it.

You will pardon me if I have made my letter too long. When I get a good cigar, the wild freedom of the typewriter and have Montana, Vermont,

the big outdoors or a magazine in which I am interested to talk about I'm usually given to more words than a Baptist preacher making a Thanksgiving Day prayer. But then, you should get a whiff of the cigars I smoke.

EDWARD GUTTERIDGE, one of our Texas comrades, gives us some interesting information on that mysterious secret order the Senussi:

In a recent copy of *Adventure*, I read a short piece about that strange sect called the Senussi. Now this brief history may be interesting to readers of *Adventure*:

THE Senussi, which derives its name from the Senus Mountains of Algeria, was founded by Mohammed ben Ali, born at Mostagenem, Algeria, in 1796. He was a lawyer who taught revolutionary religious views. He might be called the "Martin Luther of Islam."

He taught in many Mohammedan countries and was driven from place to place until in 1855 he established himself at Jaghub, about 130 miles southwest of Sollum, in the midst of the great African desert. The Sultan of Turkey, doubtless glad to so dispose of this trouble-maker, gave him title to Jaghub.

THE tenets of the order are based on a return to the original teachings of Mohammed, the prophet, freed from heresy and innovation. The founder joined to this economic methods of cultivation and colonization and he laid down a policy, which was followed by his successor, of avoiding civilized races, either Christian or Musliman.

The founder's successor was his second son, Sidi el Mahdi, who inherited the chieftainship in 1850. He was considered a Mahdi by the Bedouins because he had blue eyes and one arm longer than the other and he soon acquired authority over a vast stretch of the Sahara.

IN 1894 the Sultan of Turkey politely invited him to visit Constantinople. The invitation was not accepted and indeed the Senussi was much disturbed at the interest shown in him by the Turks and there was a rumor that a kidnapping plot had been hatched on the Golden Horn.

In 1902 Ahmed el Shereef became the third Senussi. The sultan continued to annoy him but could never threaten or cajole him into submission.

I AM personally a little embarrassed as a result of "Are You an American?" in the October "Camp-Fire." You may remember that this article declared vehemently against hyphenated American citizenship, saying that any man who takes the oath necessary to become a citizen of the United States and then breaks it in act, word or thought is a liar, a perjurer and a traitor. My embarrassment is this: the article opened with a letter quoted from

Frank H. Huston of California, voicing sentiments similar to those of the article, and some who have written us about it have made the mistaken inference that Mr. Huston wrote the article itself.

All but one of the letters received have heartily endorsed it and I hesitated to come forward claiming the credit for what they praised. But on the other hand I know, as stated in the article itself, that such an outspoken statement against many people in this country was bound to make enemies as well as friends and I have no desire to shirk their enmity. So I take this opportunity to say it was I who wrote the article and that I assume full and entire responsibility.

INDEED, I should be glad to say the same things over again at every and any opportunity. Not so long ago the country was indignant and alarmed over hyphenism, but now that the open demonstration of it has passed we are following our usual custom of going to sleep again. The danger, however, remains. The more we sleep, the greater it grows, ready, when a crisis comes again, to become once more a grave menace to the nation. We can not afford to sleep. The cure for this evil lies in personal action by you and me. America is for Americans, and half-way Americans are not Americans. The customs and language of the "old countries" must be left

behind with the severed allegiance to the old countries, and when the old allegiance is severed it must be wholly severed.

Read again the law of the United States that prescribes the exact words of the oath a man must twice take to become an American citizen:

He shall declare, on oath, that he will support the Constitution of the United States, and that he absolutely and entirely renounces and abjures all allegiance and fidelity to every foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty; and, particularly, by name, to the prince, potentate, state or sovereignty of which he was before a citizen or subject.

All the hair-splitting in the world can not shake the meaning of that oath. It covers everything. What is the man who breaks it? What are we if we allow him to break it in either little things or great?

IN REFERENCE to this same article I desire to correct an inaccuracy kindly pointed out to me by several of you. It was not the Governor of Massachusetts but the Mayor of Boston who attempted to distribute sprigs of Irish green to one of the National Guard regiments, the "Fighting Ninth," marching out for service on the Mexican border, the regiment's Colonel declining to accept the emblem and replying "I am proud of my Irish blood, but on this day I am nothing but an American."

"ASK ADVENTURE"

ADVENTURE is more than a magazine. It has become more and more during its six years a clearing-house for its readers, a service bureau, an institution. The "Camp-Fire" and its various departments serve you in many ways. They have restored lost relatives, reunited families, found long-lost friends, located missing heirs, supplied men for expeditions, explorations and other adventures in all parts of the world, given isolated or lonely readers friends by correspondence, originated and founded the American Legion, organizing many thousands of men for the nation's defense, been instrumental in founding or helping a dozen other movements for Preparedness, acted as your mail address, holding or

forwarding letters to and from all parts of the globe, giving or getting you information of a thousand kinds.

And always there has been service of another kind, not included in the "Camp-Fire" and its departments. When I look back over past years I am amazed at the multiplicity and variety of the occasions on which we have been called into the personal and private affairs of our readers and writers to be of what service we could—a strange list of things often seemingly having no earthly connection with an editorial office. Marriage, divorce, broken engagements, deaths, funerals, hospitals, inheritances, in all these and in a thousand other problems, perplexities, ambitions, efforts

and successes of "our people" have we been asked to take a hand at one time or another.

AND we have received as well as given. Never have we turned to "our people" for help or advice without generous result. There is more than service involved. This something else shows in the letters from you that speak of *Adventure* as "our magazine." It shows in the personal, human touch established between so many of you and us here in the office, a relationship that varies all the way from mere kindly feeling to real friendship. Sometimes I think that among my best friends are certain men I have never seen. It sounds like exaggeration, but it is true.

It is, of course, good "policy" for a magazine to render practical service to its readers and we are not hypocritical enough to claim that we don't know it. But the relationship between *Adventure* and its readers has become a good deal more than a matter of policy. Giving service has become not only a natural part of our office work but a pleasure, making that work not just a routine task but a human, friendly intercourse with men of all kinds in all parts of the world. Maybe some people still believe an editor is some kind of dried-up old bird who cares more about paper and ink than about live people and life and living. Well, there are dried-up old birds in all walks of life, but we claim that our share of failings doesn't include that particular failing.

ANYHOW we are just plain glad that *Adventure* is going to add a new service to its readers, one that it has for several years wanted to add. For a long time we couldn't hit on the right method and the right men. Now we think we have done it.

Adventure is always being asked for all kinds of information on all kinds of subjects even remotely connected with its field. It's a big field when you come to think of it, and, while we could answer a few of the questions, there were many we had to refer to some of our other readers or writers, or to the Camp-Fire in general, and many we had to send back unanswered. Now we're going to start a regular bureau for supplying information to our readers. At first it will consist of eight departments, covering (1) the sea, (2) western United States, (3) the snow countries of North America, (4)

southern Asia, (5) Asia Minor, (6) Russia and Siberia, (7) The Balkans, (8) Eastern U. S. Lake, River and Road Travel—each in charge of an expert. As time goes on we expect to add other departments until the whole big adventure field is covered, but we shall add slowly, never including a new department until we've found an expert we are satisfied has the required knowledge and integrity. It is necessary to build soundly and solidly.

THE service is open and free to anybody, provided only that he send a stamped and addressed envelope for reply. Questions should be sent not to this office, but direct to the expert of the department in whose field it falls. He will reply to the best of his ability, using his own discretion in all matters pertaining to the department but assuming no responsibility beyond the moral one of doing the best he can. His reply will be made direct to you, but a copy of it and of your questions will be sent to this office and from these we'll select for publication in the magazine those that promise to be most useful and interesting to our readers in general, thus making the bureau of service to all.

The bureau will be called "Ask *Adventure*" and it will begin in the next issue of the magazine. In the fields named it will cover matters pertaining to the outdoor world of adventure—hunting, fishing, trapping, packing, tracking, general and personal equipment, prospecting, sailing, ships, boats and canoes, skis, snow-shoes and sleds, sports, trips (not tourist tours), and so on down the line.

SEND in your questions now. They will be answered promptly. No questions and answers can be published in *Adventure*, however, for probably two or three issues after this one, for a magazine is made up ahead and there will not be time to get them into earlier issues. In the next issue, February, the experts in charge will talk to you direct and give you an outline of their experience, and in following numbers they will give various pieces of information that are likely sooner or later to be sought by inquirers.

Do not send your question to *Adventure* but send it direct to the expert in charge of the field in which it belongs. Here are their names and addresses:

(1) The Sea—Frederick William Wallace, *Canadian Fisherman*, 45 St. Alexander St., Montreal, Canada.

(2) Western United States—E. E. Hariman, 2336 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

(3) North American Snow Counties—C. E. Gilman, Gheen, Minn.

(4) Southern Asia—Gordon McCreagh, 236 W. 15th Street, New York City.

(5) The Balkans—A. D. H. Smith, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City.

(6) Russia and Siberia—A. M. Lochwitzky, 104 W. Oak St., Chicago (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.).

(7) Asia Minor—Frederick Simpich (address, temporarily, care ADVENTURE).

(8) Eastern U. S. Lake, River and Road Travel—Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y.

Do not ask questions that would keep a man busy two weeks writing the answer even if he had all the information at his

fingers'-ends. Nor questions that do not belong in the particular field of the expert you ask, or that do not belong in the general adventure field. Do not ask the experts for chances to join expeditions; the "Wanted" column ends in this issue and its work will not be carried on, for the reasons given. If you ask for general information about a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you for details to some book or books or local or special sources of information.

IN OTHER words, do not expect the impossible, but do expect the best possible service of this kind that can be rendered. It will prove invaluable to thousands of you and "Ask Adventure" will become well-known words standing for an ever-ready source of information and friendly help to all who are interested in the outdoor world. Send in your questions.

VOTE FOR THE TEN BEST ADVENTURE STORIES OF 1916

DON'T forget the voting contest announced at last month's Camp-Fire. It will help us in getting the kind of stories the majority of you like best.

Very easy to do. Just take a separate sheet of paper and write:

(1) List of the ten stories, *given in order of preference*, that you consider the ten best stories published in *Adventure* during 1916 (January to December issues inclusive). Giving name of author also in each case will make things surer.

(2) About how many of the twelve 1916 issues of *Adventure* have you read? (If not 5 or more, do not vote.)

(3) Name and address.

And if, in addition to the ten, you wish to add a few others you liked almost as well, give them too in order of preference. We'll call it "honorable mention" and it may serve to break a possible tie among the first ten.

THERE are only a few rules, but note them carefully:

Any one may vote *provided* he has read at least five (5) of the 1916 issues of *Adventure*. (We mean the twelve issues with that date

printed on them—that is, January, 1916, to December, 1916, inclusive.)

Serials, novels, novelettes, articles and short stories are eligible, including serials only part of which were published during 1916. "Camp-Fire," poems and anything written by A. S. H. are barred.

You may vote for more than one story by the same author.

No votes reaching us later than December 31, 1916, will be counted.

Don't let stories in the earlier issues suffer because those in later issues are fresher in your memory. We'll reject any ballot covering only the last two or three issues of the magazine.

Stories in this issue (January, 1917), though it reaches you during 1916, will *not* be counted.

HERE'S a chance to say your say on the kind of story you wish to see in *Adventure*, and to have your say count. We want our readers to work *with* us in making *Adventure* just what they want to have it, and we'll consider it a favor if you'll send in your vote. Indeed, I'm asking it as a personal favor to me, from those of you to whom I have in the past been able to be of some small service of one kind or another. I have no hesitation in putting it this way, for, after all, it's really more

for your benefit than for mine. Send in your vote.

MAURICE DRAKE, who several years ago gave us the serial story "Wrack," that made a particular appeal to many of you, is also among those of our contributors now at the front in the great European war. Some time ago I had a look at another serial of his, liked it very much, but found some parts of it not quite in tune with the usual song we try to sing. I learn now that he has remodeled it, and that it will reach me in a month or so. Here's hoping it is going to appear in our pages.

ADVENTURERS, ATTENTION!

LETTERS have poured in enthusiastically endorsing the idea of a world-wide order of adventurers on a larger scale than the present Adventurers' Club, as suggested by John J. Garvey and Identification Card 1927 and as set forth at the October Camp-Fire. There will be no trouble in getting members. The important thing is to go slowly and build solidly.

It should be arranged so that any eligible adventurer anywhere could join without too much red-tape. On the other hand there should be some way of sifting the sheep from the goats. If the machinery necessary to accomplish these things necessitates putting a good deal of responsibility and authority in the hands of a few men, then these few men should be selected with extreme care. In any case the world should be divided into districts, each with its own executive officer or officers but all bound together and under supervision and control of general headquarters.

WAYNE EBERLY, who when he lived in this city was an active member of the New York Chapter of the Adventurers' Club, has volunteered to undertake the preliminary work of organization. (You'll remember that mail addressed to Mr. Garvey has been returned unclaimed.) I have sent to Mr. Eberly the numerous suggestions from interested adventurers, and all future suggestions and applications should be sent direct to him. Address

WAYNE EBERLY,
542 Engineers Bldg.,
Cleveland, Ohio.

The matters of name, badge and dues are

among the questions to be decided. Dues should be small—a few cents, but enough to cover cost of stationery, badges, postage, etc. The order's name should avoid a too-close similarity to that of the Adventurers' Club, and the word "Camp-Fire" should also be avoided, because there are already one or two organizations using that name and because the order should not be under even suspicion of being some kind of circulation scheme for this magazine. *Adventure* will have no authority in the affairs of the order nor will any of its staff be among those in active charge. It will, however, be keenly interested and will gladly stand ready to lend whatever support and assistance it can.

THE order or brotherhood can be made not only a very big thing but something of decided practical value to its members, especially by its promotion of fellowship among wanderers in far corners of the earth. If you are one of the "outdoor people" with a little tickling around the soles of your feet, or if you have been one of them in the past, write to Mr. Eberly, make suggestions, offer your help, enroll as an applicant for membership and watch these columns for announcements and news from the order.

IT ALWAYS does you good to meet a real fellow. I met one last Summer who was particularly good to meet. A mile or two back from the Maine lake where we were having some good bait-casting for small-mouths lives a man who makes snow-shoes. We'd never met him but we knew about his shoes, so one day we dropped in on him and his wife to order some for this Winter.

He's been making snow-shoes since 1878—thirty-eight years. He makes them right there in his little home. Often his wife webs in the heels and toes, and his young grandson from the farmhouse across the road is being trained in to the work. Sometimes there have been other assistants. One of them, I heard, when he had learned what was to be learned, established a factory that turns out many shoes, good shoes but not quite the same shoes as his teacher makes.

I heard, too, that some of the teacher's models have become standards throughout the country. Peary stood on a pair of this man's snow-shoes when he discovered the

North Pole. For each of his last two polar expeditions Admiral Peary ordered sixty pairs of these shoes. One of the dozen models he makes was worked out by him for special service in the Arctic according to Peary's own specifications. The man is a good workman. He has a right to be proud of his work and he *is* proud of it. But it is the kind of honest pride that gains your respect.

BUT it was as a man that he most won us. I can not hope to picture him fully, but one single thing will show you the kind of man he is. The price of raw materials has advanced tremendously in forty years. To protect their own profits manufacturers have increased selling prices accordingly. But this man has not done so. He says: "I've been making these shoes many years at that price and I'll never increase it as long as I live." I questioned him a little and after a while it came out that his real reason for this was a kind of loyalty to his old customers and a spirit of fair dealing that would not permit one price to old customers, another price to new. Think it over. Wouldn't you be willing to trust that man about as far as trust could go?

HE HAS lived in deer country all his life. Both he and his wife love the rifle and can use it well. He has killed deer when the meat was needed, but so seldom that I am afraid to state how small the number has been. He does not like to shoot a deer.

He has always lived where bear tracks are still common and naturally he has seen thousands. He has not made a business of hunting bears and he admits that in all his life he has seen only two, aside from tame or dead ones. To those who know the habits of bears this will be some proof of truthfulness.

But he kills with a mingling of joy and duty any animal that comes under the head of "varmint." And if he will not raise the price of his snow-shoes neither will he lower it one penny for any man or for any quantity of shoes. Peary paid exactly the full retail price for each of his hundred and twenty pair, just as I did for my one pair.

I have told only a few things of him, but is there any doubt in your mind that he's a "real fellow"?

OF THE devotion between him and his wife I shall not speak, for that is their affair, not ours, but I wish to pay my tribute to it and to her as well as to him.

I shall not soon forget them. We went to see them more than once, they showed us interesting relics and souvenirs from Peary and others who had proved their snow-shoes, he joined us in our fishing, but I shall always think of him first as he sat in the spotless kitchen, a small man with shoulders stooped and immensely muscled from forty years of stretching rawhide, kindly but strong of face, honest of eye, a partly finished snow-shoe between his knees, his fingers flying as he wove the web tight and strong. Dogs, the grandchildren, the wife, the man himself, we ourselves, I think, seemed to bear unconscious testimony to the atmosphere that is found where the clean, strong sweet things of life have had their being, to two lives well lived by two "real fellows." Those of you who go to church least will perhaps best know what I mean when I say that the memory of that simple scene is a sermon that abides

LETTER-FRIENDS

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

(51) Andrew Doremus, Troop G, 7th Cav., Columbus, N. M.

(52) F. B. Kohlmorgen, 14610 Pepper Ave., Cleveland, O.

(53) Francis B. Mendoza, 23 Claremont Park, Boston, Mass., to hear from those interested in Latin America.

(54) Ralph Smith, 114 S. Wahsatch Ave., Colorado Springs, Colo.

(55) F. G. Wolfe, U. S. S. *Connecticut*, Philadelphia, to hear from men in Los Angeles, Calif.

(56) Ray J. Monroe, care N. Y. C. Ticket Office, Allegan, Mich.

(57) Hugo E. Rubinstein, 621 E. 170th St., New York City.

OUR identification cards remain free to any readers. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.*

We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card*—not in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to give in full the *names and addresses of self, friend or friends when applying.*

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure of*. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal.

Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Wallace's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers, provided necessary postage is supplied, or to hold mail till called for.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., \$1.00.

Red-Headed Regiment, Fred C. Adams, Chatham, N. Y. Gray-Headed Regiment, address Major Guillermo MacFergus, care *Adventure*.

Marine Corps Gazette, 24 E. 23rd St., New York.

For rifle clubs, Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. N. B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.

DISCONTINUED

IT IS *Adventure's* aim not only to entertain its readers but also to be a magazine of service. Whenever we see a way in which we can render some practical service to "our people" we try to render that service. It was in accordance with this policy that nearly four years ago we instituted our Wanted column, and this department has been of material value to many of you. The replies to notices appearing in it have generally run well up into the hundreds and it has been the means of supplying men for expeditions and adventures all over the world.

WE SHOULD like to continue this service to you, but, though during the four years nearly all who availed themselves of it have scrupulously abided by its rules and intent, now and then some one, by means of a notice fully in keeping on the face of it with the spirit of the department, has deceived us as to the real purpose concealed behind it.

IT IS hard to penalize the ninety-nine for the offense of the one, but *Adventure* has earned a reputation for being just what it seems to be, for straight dealing and for entire honesty and frankness. That reputation is precious to us, we shall not lose it by conscious act of our own and we do not propose to lose it through unfair dealing on the part of a few

readers who thank us for our free service to them by betraying us. Therefore we feel that the service of the Wanted column must be discontinued altogether.

I WISH, however, to extend our sincere appreciation and thanks to the ninety-nine per cent. of you who, during the four years, have availed yourselves of the department and abided strictly by both the letter and the spirit of its intent. That abuses have been so extremely rare is high tribute to the type of people who read *Adventure*. I know that you will place the blame for the discontinuance of the Wanted department not upon the magazine but upon those few individuals who have shown themselves not only sneaks and liars, but poor sports who are willing to deprive their comrades of a privilege by abusing it for their own selfish ends.

I AM GLAD that though we can no longer give you this particular service the total of *Adventure's* service to readers is soon to be greatly increased by the addition in the next issue of an entirely new department, "Ask *Adventure*," described in the preceding pages. The net result is that *Adventure* will be giving its readers far more of practical service even than in the past.—A. S. H.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

PALMER, A. M., Jr., son of A. M. Palmer, N. Y. theatrical manager of 20 years ago. Last seen by me on U. S. receiving ship *Independence*, Mare Island, Navy Yard, Calif., Sept. 2, 1900. Joined the U. S. S. *Marblehead*, Cob Dock, Bklyn., March '09. Nicknamed by his shipmates "Mazie." Rating in Navy, ship's "writer" at time enlistment, later storeroom keeper on U. S. S. *Marblehead*, 5 ft., 135 lbs., brown hair, blue eyes and white teeth. Mother's home in Hartford, Conn. Would like to hear from him or any one who knows his address.—Address **LYOYD L. AUSTIN**, 30 Lenzen Avenue, San Jose, Calif.

CURTIS, GEORGE, last seen at Norwood, Texas, when I, his half-brother, George Robinson, left him to go North. Later he went to Hewitt, Texas, 5 ft., 23 years. Would like to hear from him as soon as possible.—Address **GEORGE ROBINSON**, care of R. J. GLENN, Axtell, Texas, R. F. D. No. 2, Box 36.

CLANCY or CLANCEY, TIMOTHY, formerly of Australia. Left me at Calexico, Calif., in Spring '13 for Brazil, S. A., via New Orleans. You promised to write. I still have the mirror you gave me. Write to your old English pal "Kit."—Address **A. H. O.**, 1213 7th Street, Santa Monica, Calif.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

AMERICAN LEGION boys of the 97th Battalion, C. E. F., please state in *Adventure* if they come across this notice, and also give their present address, as I wish to correspond with them. Especially boys of the 16th Platoon, D. Co.—Address **G. E. HUDSON**, Milwaukee, Wis.

GRAHAM, JOSEPH ALEX, last heard from was at Winachee, Wash. Lived in Seattle, Wash., from 1901 to 1906. In Portland, Ore., from 1906 to 1910. Previous to 1901 he lived in Chelard, Wash. Dark complexion, dark eyes, gray hair, and has a mustache. 5 ft., 160 lbs.—Address **A. B. GRAHAM**, 706 Herkimer St., Pasadena, Calif.

SWANANDER, GUST AND PETE, last heard from before the flood in Galveston, Texas. Both residing in Galveston, Texas, at that time. Any information will be gladly received by their nephew.—Address **EMMETT SWANANDER**, 315 20th Ave., North, Minneapolis, Minn.

COMRADES: Robinson, Boyd; Welch, Douglas Tyler, George; Fish, Eber; and Olson, Ole; o the U. S. Signal Corps in Manila, 1905-1907. Communicate with your old "side-kicker."—Address **R. A. HOWARD**, 172 No. 4th St., Oldtown, Maine.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In each February issue all unfound names, inquired for during the two preceding years, will be printed again.

DUNN, MARK M., my father, last heard of in New York City. Daughter anxious to hear from him. I also would like to hear from my brother, Mark M. Dunn, Jr.—Address **MRS. ETTA WOOLSEY**, 22 Cook Street, Jersey City, N. J.

STUART, HARRY (Curly), last heard of in N. Y. C. in 1913. Home in Pittsburg, Pa. Write to your old pal "Red" and you will hear of something to your interest in regard to Denver.—Address **R. H. WHITE**, Co. C., 10th Inf., Camp E. S. Otis, C. Z., Panama.

WHITE, THOMAS J., who joined the U. S. Army about 15 years ago at Chattanooga, Tenn.—Address **FRED TRIBLE**, 13 Company, Columbus Barracks, Columbus, Ohio.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In each February issue all unfound names, inquired for during the two preceding years, will be printed again.

LIBERATI, EUGEN, my former partner. Lost year and a half ago. Want him to come out here so we can go together and look after Western interests.—Address **T. H. HILLS**, 223 C. St., Lawton, Okla.

NICKERSON, JOSEPH, cigarmaker. Last heard of in Canada. Born in New Orleans. Knew him in Trenton and Tampa.—Address **E. RINGOLD**, care of Lee, 1 West 131st St., New York City.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

"DUTCH" LYONS, my old buddy, also Jim Howley, formerly of Edmonton, Alta., Canada, now probably at the front, write. Would very much like to know your whereabouts.—Address **T. H. WINTERS**, Troop D., 4th U. S. Cavalry, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

TALMADGE, GEORGE W. and **RUBEN W.**, my father and uncle. Any one knowing of their whereabouts, please write.—Address **ALONZO L. TALMADGE**, Algona, Iowa.

WOULD like to correspond with parties who participated in expedition to Tiburon Island about eighteen months ago.—Address **J. R. HARRIS**, Room 209, EP & SW Ry. Bldg., El Paso, Texas.

DILLIERT, HOWARD, born in Bethlehem, Pa. You remember "Shannon's" and "Shaw's" in Toledo. Write me.—Address **Gunner W. J. HACKER**, 69th Bat'y, C. F. A., Petawawa Camp, Ont., Can.

MC CARTHY, J. J. (Spike): Windy would like to hear from you.—Address **F. G. WOLFE**, U. S. S. *Connecticut*, Philadelphia, Pa.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the November or December issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

AVELING, of London; Billman, John (Jack); Brinton, Arthur H.; Carpenter, William Charles; Cartwright, Jack; Cliff, Harry J.; Cooper, B. F.; Decker, E. L.; Sergt. U. S. M. C.; DeLaCour, Joseph W.; Doven, John; Drinkwater, Everett E.; Duncan, Jasper N., last heard of in Salt Lake City or Anacanda; Fernald, L. W.; Frain, James, last heard of in St. Louis in 1875; Fromme, Harry E.; Gilbert, "Pink Pill"; Hawley, or Holley, Mrs. Grace; Houston, W. T. D. (pronounced Euston); Hulings, Frank; Jette, Herbert; Johnson, W. H., Mexico, 1913; Lloyd, Ralph; McCann, Elman C., last seen at 107 West 96th St., N. Y. C.; McGorray, Lawrence; MacKenzie, Thomas, telegraph dispatcher; McLaughlin, Moses Hunt; Mahoney, Ed., alias New Orleans Eddie; Marx, last seen in "Prisco" Miller, Marcellus Del.; Monahan, Chas., "Top" Sergt.; Mulligan, Martin; Olsen, Edward T.; Ovestry; Peralto, Jose L., New Orleans, 1914; Quinn, Arthur; Richard, Arthur; Schmidt, Louisa and Charles; Sharp, Jesse R.; Shaw, William F., left home about June 19-20, 1916; Slider, Ada; Spears, R. S.; Stewart, Fred S., ex-gunner's mate of the *Georgia*; Stringfellow, Jessamine; Tannebaum, Leslie; Taylor, Charles G.; Ton, W. R., San Francisco at "Kenil worth"; Travers, Stanley, English; Van Pelt, Ellis Loy; Wildt, John; Wilson, D. L., last seen in Savin Rock, Conn., Sept., 1914.

LAURENCE STEWART, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Gaynor Maddox, Mrs. Maude Thomas, Hattar Gal Breath, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293, W 311, W 312. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given

us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

PLEASE NOTE

Hereafter, owing to lack of space, all names inquired for during the two preceding years will be printed in each February issue.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The following stories are scheduled for the February issue of ADVENTURE in your hands January 3d:

Nobody's Island

A new adventure fresh from the South Seas. The folks are real folks; the plot one of tremendous action; the setting vivid as the flash of a Papuan war-paddle in the sun. Told by a writer world-famous for man-sized tales of the Pacific Islands. A complete, book-length novel by

Beatrice Grimshaw

Finished

H. Rider Haggard

The second part of this thrilling serial carries Allan Quatermain on into the heart of seething Zululand. One of the big stories of the year.

In Self-Defense

W. C. Tuttle

For genuine, rapid-fire fun—a hundred laughs to the hour—you've got to hand it to Tuttle. Next month he tangles you in a Western marriage mix-up that will keep you chuckling and guessing till the last plate of "ham and" is served across the counter of a little cow-town restaurant.

Discipline

Robert J. Pearsall

U. S. Regulars in China. A rookie who didn't believe in discipline. And the climax of a feud between American and Austrian soldiers.

A Royal Flush of Hearts

Gordon Young

A poker game with the future happiness of a man and woman as stakes.

Against Chance

Charles C. Jones

This battle of wits—and feet—between clever pickpockets and a green policeman will take your breath.

The Fox Trot of the Crazy Glean

David Potter

In which you see the end of a man-hunt, the heart of a girl, and something new in gun-play.

A Crossed Trail

M. S. Wightman

The steel fist of Japan is poised over our pitifully weak Asiatic Squadron off Shanghai. A single man stands between, and to save the fleet it's up to him to trick the cleverest woman in the Jap Secret Service. You'll want to know him.

Strict Justice, and Cheap

E. E. Harriman

You learn the way they hand out justice in the mountains of California. A hold-up, a man-hunt, and a corking scrap with the odds one to four.

The Pride of McNeal

Russell A. Boggs

McNeal is a railroad man and he does his duty though his whole future is at stake. A powerful story by a new man.

The One Way Out

Hapsburg Liebe

This writer, who knows the folks up in his Tennessee hills so well, gives you a tale of a mountain feud; also, he snaps a big surprise for you at the end.

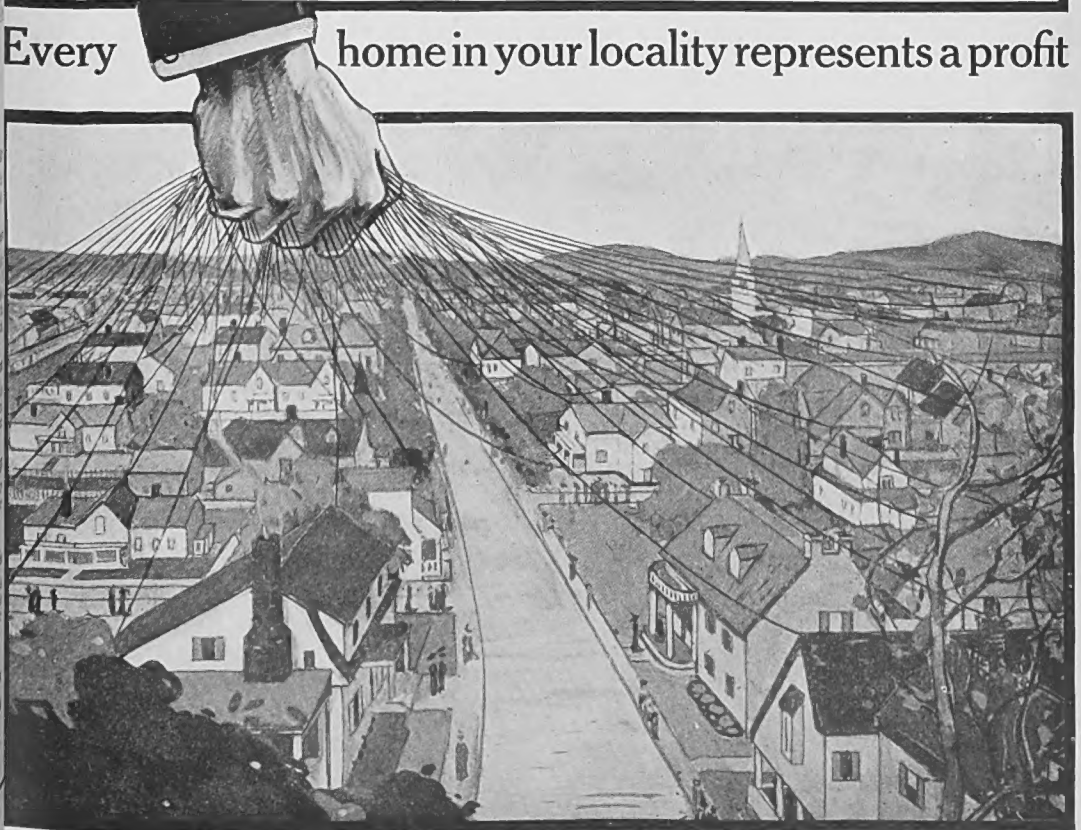
FEBRUARY ADVENTURE

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